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**THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE  
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT:  
EXPRESSION AND IMPACT IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING**

Thesis submitted for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**2015**

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School of Business  
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## SUMMARY: THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of workplace Industrial Relations (IR) conflict. The inspiration for research was the dominant focus of previous inquiry on strike action. This has two key limitations. Firstly, strike activity has exhibited a marked decline since the 1970s in Ireland (Scheuer, 2006; Roche & Teague, 2010) and abroad (Gall, 2012; Godard, 2011, 2014). Despite this decline, it is thought that IR conflict - inherent in the employment relationship - remains (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008, Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Therefore, focusing on the strike expression of IR conflict fails to reflect our contemporary context. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a longstanding view in literature that IR conflict is expressed in a variety of ways (Kerr, 1954). However, research has continued to focus on the strike expression. In this regard, the focus of previous research on one expression has limited our understanding of a central aspect in the employment relationship.

The research objective of exploring the nature of workplace IR conflict more broadly is underpinned by two research questions: (i) how do employees express workplace IR conflict?, and (ii) how does workplace IR conflict impact on the workplace? In order to address the research objective and answer the questions posed a qualitative methodology was employed. Specifically, four embedded and comparative case studies were conducted in the Irish hospital setting. These four cases were undertaken in medical laboratories where under the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy employees face revised on-call payments, an extended working day, changes to work practices and skill mix, and redeployment. The case studies draw on observation and documentation. However, due to the ontological stance adopted (O'Regan, 2009), emphasis is placed on interview data and the lived experience of participants. In-case interviews were conducted with 42 participants from varying groups: HR/IR, Laboratory Management, Trade Union Representatives, Phlebotomy, Medical Laboratory Scientists of different grades, Medical Lab Aides, and Support Staff. An additional 10 interviews were conducted with HSE senior management, regional HR/IR management, Trade Union leadership, and industry experts for design and context purposes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, creating over 940 pages of raw data. Several phases of iterative thematic analysis using inductive and deductive approaches were then applied (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The findings confirm the existence of many expressions speculated on in existing literature, and identify some additional ways in which employees express IR conflict in the workplace. In this regard, it is concluded that the strike expression is one in an array of options available to employees to express workplace IR conflict. The research proposes the Threat Response Theory of



Workplace IR Conflict. Expressions are inductively clustered to create a framework of employee responses to IR conflict: Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fix. This framework offers a more inclusive categorisation than previous attempts, and recognises that – due to the power imbalance in the employment relationship – employees, when expressing IR conflict, are responding to threat.

The findings indicate that the nature of workplace IR conflict differs from our traditional view. Despite the decline in strike activity, this study found extensive evidence of IR conflict. However, participants described a reluctance to engage in strike, or any form of formal industrial action. Instead of being collective and unionised, the findings suggest that IR conflict has become a more individualised pursuit. This provides empirical evidence supporting speculation amongst IR theorists (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Gall, 2013; Godard, 2011, 2014; Saundry & Dix, 2014). The data also demonstrates that participants had a preference for covert and passive expressions of IR conflict. Related to these characteristics, the study finds that IR conflict is increasingly beyond the remit of Trade Unions where employees reject their involvement, and union representatives seem unable to galvanise discontent into any form of directed action.

Adding to our understanding of how IR conflict expressions develop in the workplace, the data provides support for Hebdon and Noh (2013) who found, in their quantitative study, that expressions of IR conflict can escalate following non-resolution. In addition, the case findings demonstrate that, following non-resolution, employees can de-escalate their response and pursue more passive expressions of IR conflict. Three additional transmission mechanisms which replicate IR conflict expressions are identified in the data as contagion effects; venting and the creation of shared reactance; and culture to create coalescence of expression. These mechanisms indicate how individual expressions can be replicated across the workplace collective to create an aggregate impact at workplace level.

The findings indicate that the impact of IR conflict - much like its expression - is varied. While previous research has focused on the impact of strikes in terms of working days lost, this research suggests that non-strike expressions of IR conflict, though less dramatic and quantifiable, erode the day-to-day productivity in the workplace. The findings also demonstrate that IR conflict impacts on the workplace in terms of ability to change, pursue mission, and ultimately survive.

This study concludes that the nature of IR conflict is, as a function of individuals, relationships and context, complex – and ever-present. Though strike activity has declined, IR conflict continues to exist in the lived experience of people at work.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

• Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (UK)	ACAS
• Department of Health and Children	DOHC
• Evidence Based Medicine	EBM
• Evidence Based Laboratory Medicine	EBLM
• European Central Bank	ECB
• Emergency Department	ED
• Employment Appeals Tribunal	EAT
• Employment Tribunal	ET
• Exit-Loyalty-Voice-Neglect	ELVN
• Exit-Loyalty-Voice	ELV
• Gross Domestic Product	GDP
• Health Service Executive	HSE
• Health Service Executive Employers Agency	HSE-EA
• Human Resources	HR
• Human Resource Management	HRM
• Industrial Relations	IR
• Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	IPA
• Irish Municipal, Public and Civil Trade Union	IMPACT
• Labour Court Recommendation	LCR
• Labour Relations Commission	LRC
• Laboratory	Lab
• Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy	LMRS
• Medical Laboratory Scientists Association	MLSA
• Medical Laboratory	Medlab
• Medical Lab Aide	MLA
• Medical Laboratory Technologist Association	MLTA
• Multiple Stakeholder Theory	MST
• Non Consultant Hospital Doctor	NCHD
• National Health Service (UK)	NHS
• Organisation Behaviour	OB
• Phlebotomists Association of Ireland	PAI
• Public Service Agreement	PSA
• Research Ethics Committee	REC
• Services Industrial Profession and Technical Union	SIPTU
• Standards of Practice	SOP
• Thematic Analysis	TA
• United Kingdom	UK
• United States	US
• Workplace Employment Relations Study	WERS

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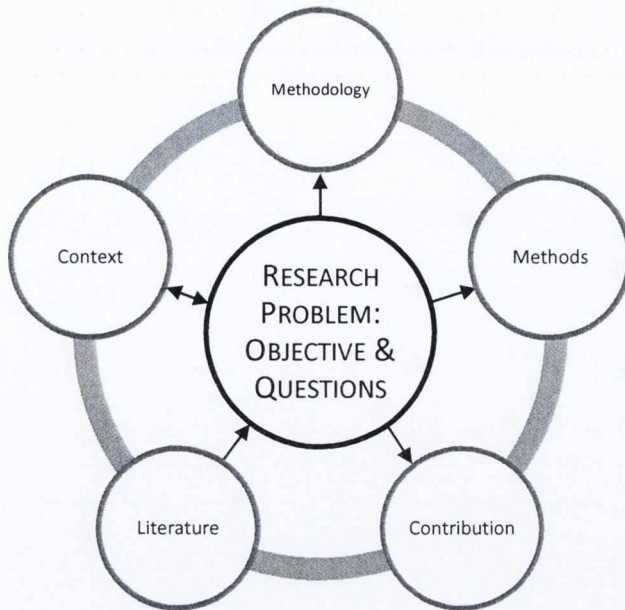


## ***CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION***

### **EXPLORING THE NATURE OF**

### **WORKPLACE**

### **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**



"All research begins with the selection of a problem. In formulating the problem and putting it in researchable terms, the researcher makes several crucial decisions. Initially, the main concerns are (1) what entities are... to be studied; (2) what aspects or characteristics of these entities are of interest; (3) what kinds of relationships among the characteristics are anticipated. Making decisions about these concerns is the object of research design" (Singleton and Straits, 1999:65).

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

While issues of research design are often left to the methodology chapter, the concerns identified by Singleton and Straits (1999) are evident throughout the research process (Brannick, 1997) and, as such, implicitly or explicitly, throughout the research dissertation. Edmondson and McManus (2007:1155), adopting a similar view, explain that a study should strive for 'fit' or "internal consistency among elements of a research project - research question, prior work, research design, and theoretical contribution". The diagram above, used throughout this research dissertation, attempts to sketch the two types of fit captured by Edmondson and McManus (2007:1156): vertical fit, where each element serves the research question, and horizontal fit, where each element is "mutually reinforcing". Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study as a whole and signal its 'fit', before each element is expounded further in the ensuing chapters. In doing so, this chapter will introduce both the research background and the research problem including an outline of the study rationales. The research context is introduced before the methodological approach and the methods supporting it are considered. Finally, an overview is provided of the research dissertation where chapters are mapped onto elements of research design.



## 1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND STUDY RATIONALE

This study is located in the area of industrial relations (IR), which is defined as the study of "the regulation, control and... governance of work and the employment relationship" (Clarke *et al.*, 2008:2). Specifically, the project is concerned with workplace IR conflict which is defined here as follows:

'Workplace IR conflict is defined here as the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment'.

The strike is considered the foremost indicator of IR conflict (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005). However, strike activity has declined internationally (Brecher, 2000; Healy, 2002; Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Bordogna, 2010; Roche & Teague, 2010; Gall, 2013; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Many authors explain that this does not indicate an absence of IR conflict (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Hebdon *et al.*, 1999; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Roche & Teague, 2010; Hebdon & Noh, 2013; Godard, 2011, 2014). Therefore, this research seeks to explore the nature of IR conflict more broadly; its expressions and impact in the workplace setting.

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

The research objective of this study is to explore, qualitatively, the nature or 'essence' (Berg, 2009) of workplace IR conflict. The basis for this study is twofold. First, it is argued that the focus on strike activity, as the "traditional yardstick" of IR (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005: 373), is not reflective of the contemporary context. As noted above, strike activity has declined since the early 1970s in Ireland (Roche & Teague, 2010); the UK (Scheuer, 2006); Europe (Bordogna, 2010), the US (Brecher, 2000; Bordogna, 2010) and Australia (Dabscheck, 1991; Healy, 2002). However, there is an acknowledgement that this does "not necessarily mean a reduction in industrial conflict" (Hebdon *et al.*, 1999:503). Many explanations have been put forward for this decline (see Godard, 2011) with authors speculating that IR conflict has become individualised or redirected into non-strike expressions of IR conflict (Hebdon & Stern, 1998; Hebdon, 1999; Hebdon, 2005; Hebdon & Mazerolle, 2003; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Saundry & Dix, 2014; Godard, 2011, 2014). Godard (2011:238) explains that IR conflict may have been channelled into "various forms of dysfunctional behaviour not typically considered reflecting conflict" concluding however that there is little empirical research to support these views. Thus, in the context of marked decline in strike activity, continuing to focus on the strike offers an outdated view of IR conflict.

However, there is also a longstanding acknowledgement in IR literature that IR conflict is not confined to one expression. Previous literature notes that IR conflict can emerge in a multiplicity of ways (Kerr, 1954; Kornhauser *et al.*, 1954; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Despite this awareness, it is recognised amongst IR theorists that research continues to focus on the strike to the detriment of 'less spectacular' expressions of IR conflict (Kornhauser, 1982; Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Nicholson and Kelly (1980:20) explain that focusing attention on strike action means that there has been a "lack of detailed attention given to other forms of industrial conflict", while Hebdon and Stern (1998:204) posit that ignoring other expressions "may result in an incomplete understanding of the dynamics of conflict" and a gap in our knowledge. More recently, Hebdon and Noh (2013:43), conclude that "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace conflict itself despite its fundamental importance to conflict management". Therefore, the most salient critique of the strike focus is that it has limited our understanding of a central aspect in the employment relationship. Therefore, this study will explore the nature of workplace IR conflict. Underpinning this objective are two research questions:

### **Research Questions**

- I. How do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict?
- II. How does workplace industrial relations conflict impact on the workplace?

### **1.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT**

In order to investigate IR conflict in the workplace setting, the Irish healthcare sector was selected. Informed by Yin's (2009) concept of an exemplar case, and Flyvbjerg's (2004:425) recommendations on the use of a setting that is extreme or "especially problematic" (*ibid.*), this context was chosen due to its place in the public interest; its national importance; and potential for IR conflict.

Generally, the healthcare context is characterised by a number of IR features: high union density (Bartram *et al.*, 2005); a multiplicity of employee groups and unions (Truss, 2003); and professional power (Mintzberg, 1980, 1997). In addition, the healthcare context is becoming increasingly resource-constrained in Ireland (Norman, 2012) and abroad (Weber, 2011), leading to work intensification and significant reform including pay, pensions, and workplace change. The interaction of these features signal challenging relations in the sector and the potential for IR conflict.

The Irish health service, conforming to this expectation, is popularly characterised as conflict-prone (Wall, 2009) and having "highly adversarial, traditional and defensive relations" (Dobbins,

2009b). The Labour Relations Commission (2001:1) notes that "... industrial relations in the [Irish] Health Service are under continuous and sustained pressure" where a disproportionate use of State-provided dispute resolution machinery is "... indicative of the extent of industrial relations activity in the [Irish] Health Service generally". However, despite this view the Irish healthcare sector exhibits strike rates in line with comparable public service employments such as education (Cowman and Keating, 2013). Therefore, if using the traditional indicator of IR conflict, the Irish health service is not particularly conflict-prone.

In this regard the Irish health service - instrumental to national recovery (National Recovery Plan 2011-2014) and considered a problem case (LRC, 2001) - provides an exemplar setting for the study of IR conflict and an appropriate setting in which to address the research objective.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH APPROACH AND CONTRIBUTION**

Drawing on Edmondson and McManus (2007), this research project uses 'research fit' as a form of defensible reasoning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) where each element of design serves the research problem, and reinforces the other design elements and planned contribution. This study seeks to make a descriptive and theoretical contribution to the IR conflict literature, and a secondary contribution to the healthcare management literature. The research approach is now considered.

##### **RESEARCH APPROACH**

Despite early traditions of inductive, qualitative, and context-specific enquiry, IR research has become increasingly deductive and quantitative (Whitfield & Strauss, 1998, 2008). Further, research on IR conflict, preoccupied with the strike (Gall & Hebdon, 2008), has mirrored this broader trend. Franzosi (1989:348) states "[t]he bulk of strike research has used quantitative methodologies, largely as a result of the ready availability of government data...". However, Dawson (2009) notes that there has been a movement towards using a method and research approach most appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation. This is echoed by Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) who state that researchers can adopt a 'problem centric' approach where the research questions drive methodological decisions. This study seeks to explore the nature of workplace IR conflict: how it is expressed in, and impacts on, the workplace. Consequently, a qualitative approach is most suitable. First, this approach is consistent with the research objective where "... the notion of quality is essential to the nature of things" (Berg, 2009:3, citing Dabbs). Second, this approach is consistent with the intended output of a descriptive and theoretical contribution, and the underdeveloped state of IR conflict theory (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Margerison, 1969; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Providing further support for this departure, Godard (2011:229) concludes "scholars must draw on alternative

ontological and methodological lenses" to explore the less dramatic expressions of IR conflict. In this regard, the subtle expressions of IR conflict can resist quantification, and require the social scientist to get closer to the phenomenon of interest.

A qualitative case study method with an embedded case study design in four large-scale publically-funded hospitals is employed. The study also utilises the tracer method (see McDermott & Keating, 2011) which involves selecting a single strategy and following it through its progression. This acted as a context in which the phenomenon under investigation was observed directly. The tracer issue adopted for this research pertained to the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (LMRS) which, as a national priority<sup>1</sup>, involves significant workplace change including an extended working day, revised on-call payments, and redeployment.

In line with Yin (2009) and the advantages of 'converging lines of enquiry', three forms of qualitative data were collected including observation notes, documents, and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Documents and observations were used in compiling the case background: to inform an understanding of union-management-employee relations in the case, and to provide further context to themes emerging from interview data. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the research topic, ethical approval was secured within the host academic institution and the Health Service Executive (HSE). Interviews were conducted with a guarantee of organisational and individual anonymity where participants are referred to by role and case pseudonyms only. In addition, due to the small pool of potential respondents at senior levels, gender and regional references have been removed from referenced data to provide further safeguards.

Informed by Multiple Stakeholder Theory (MST) and the pluralist underpinnings of IR, 42 within-case interviews were conducted with different groups including IR/HR management, union representatives, laboratory management, phlebotomists, medical scientists of varying levels, and support staff. This provided a number of different perspectives on IR conflict, its expression and impact in the workplace. Additional interviews were conducted with union leadership, HSE senior management, regional IR/HR staff, and industry experts for design and context purposes. The study used in-depth semi-structured interviews lasting between 40 minutes and three hours. Three main areas of enquiry were pursued during interviews; (i) general questions on role and the workplace; (ii) experience and expression of IR conflict; and (iii) the impact of IR conflict. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis facilitated by NVivo<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy is identified in the National Recovery Plan (2011-2014:69), and the Public Service Agreement (2010-2014:15).

<sup>2</sup> NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software.

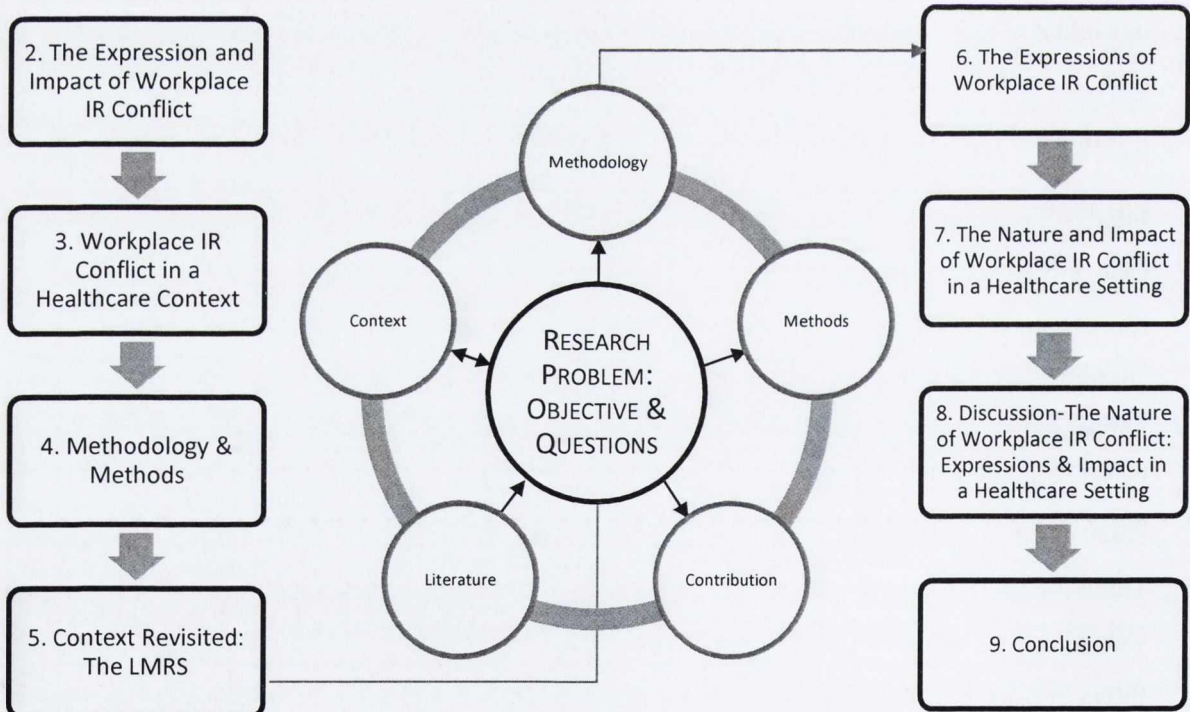
## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed. This involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research incorporated both the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive theory-driven approach involving the use of *a priori* constructs as outlined by Miles and Hubberman (1994). Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006:83) explain that the merit of this approach is allowing the study to draw on existing research and for themes to emerge directly from the data. Data analysis was conducted using iterative phases of analysis. In line with Eisenhardt (1989) and the adopted approach to theory-building, analysis was conducted on a case-by-case basis before cross-case and aggregate analysis was undertaken. This allowed patterns to emerge at case level before aggregate themes were compiled.

## 1.5 THESIS OUTLINE

This research dissertation is presented in the 'analytic style' (Dooley, 2002:343) including an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion. In addition, Chapter 5 examines the immediate Medlab research context and a conclusion is presented in Chapter 9.

Figure 1.1: The Research Design and Thesis Outline



As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the chapters in this research dissertation are mapped onto key elements of research design. This signals how the chapters of the thesis and the design elements to which they relate serve the research problem.

Chapter 2 situates the study within IR and the workplace before exploring existing definitions of conflict and IR conflict. Based on this review, the chapter expounds the working definition of IR conflict, presented at the outset of this chapter, and used in the remainder of the research dissertation. Chapter 2 will also develop the study rationales introduced here. In particular, this author considers why IR research has focused on the strike, and the implications of this narrow focus for our understanding of IR conflict. The context-specific nature of workplace IR conflict is discussed before providing an overview of literature on non-strike expressions of IR conflict, and the impact of workplace IR conflict. This chapter ends with a conceptual framework, or map of ideas, that informs this study.

The research context is discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter seeks to explicate the basis for selecting the healthcare setting. To this end the chapter will review the challenges of people-management along with the variety of IR features which characterise relations in this pluralist milieu. Beyond these characteristics, the chapter explores the evidence of IR conflict. While Irish healthcare has a reputation for IR conflict, the sector exhibits comparable strike activity. However, there is evidence to suggest that some managerial concerns in healthcare organisations may be indicative of non-strike expressions of IR conflict. Thus, healthcare offers a valuable setting in which to explore IR conflict more broadly.

Chapter 4 discusses the issues relating to research design. Specifically, the chapter reviews the merits of qualitative investigation for the research objective and questions posed. Design decisions such as the use of embedded comparative cases; tracer issue selection; and thematic analysis are considered, and similarly justified on the basis of their suitability for the study at hand. The research design is evaluated before ethical considerations are reviewed.

Owing to the context-specific nature of IR conflict (Barbash, 1979; Edwards *et al.*, 1995) and the embedded case study design, Chapter 5 revisits research context to provide an overview of the Medlab setting. The Chapter examines the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (LMRS) which, as the tracer issue for this research study, acted as an additional context for workplace IR conflict. Particular attention is paid to the fate of the LMRS in the context of collective bargaining machinery and dispute resolution provisions enshrined in the Public Service Agreement (2010-2014). Following this Chapter, the dissertation moves from issues of research design and execution to findings and contribution.

Chapter 6 presents findings on the first research question, how do employees express workplace IR conflict? The findings highlight the varied expressions of IR conflict confirming that strike is but one expression in a menu of options. In this regard the chapter concludes that the focus of IR research on the strike expression has serious limitations. Building on this descriptive analysis, the chapter – in line with the qualitative and inductive approach – clusters expressions of IR conflict into four responses: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fix. In doing so the dissertation presents the Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict. This approach provides a more inclusive categorisation of expressions. It further recognises the power imbalance and interdependence that dominates the employment relationship.

Chapter 7 builds on the analysis presented in Chapter 6 to address the research objective on the nature of workplace IR conflict. In doing so, the chapter presents findings on the characteristics of IR conflict as individualised, covert, passive and increasingly non-union. Findings are also presented on the dynamics and development of workplace IR conflict. Particular attention is paid to transmission mechanisms which replicate individual expressions across the workplace. Using this analysis to link individualised expression to the workplace level, the chapter then presents findings on the second research question, how does IR conflict impact on the workplace? The findings demonstrate that the impact on the workplace is varied. While previous literature has focused on quantitative indicators of productivity loss – particularly with respect to strike activity – the findings of this study suggest that non-strike expressions impact on productivity and beyond. The data shows that key workplace concerns, such as the ability to change and pursue mission are affected by workplace IR conflict. This further highlights the value of exploring non-strike expressions of IR conflict. The influence of the healthcare setting is also considered. Specifically the patient, professionals, and media are identified as factors in the context that influence the nature, expression, and impact of workplace IR conflict.

The purpose of this research is to make a descriptive and theoretical contribution to literature. While contributions are introduced in Chapters 6 and 7 where key links to and departures from previous research are identified, these chapters – in line with the phenomenology – focus on the participant experience. Drawing on Eisenhardt (1989), Chapter 8 centres on 'enfolding literature' to develop theory. In this regard, Chapter 8 delineates and defends the research contributions in this study.

To conclude, Chapter 9 will revisit the research process and outline the study's contributions. In addition, the Chapter will evaluate this research project and identify its limitations. Implications for further research are also considered.

## 1.6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce this research project with reference to its: research objective and questions; rationale; design; and planned contribution. In addition this chapter sought to identify the approach taken in this research dissertation, and how the chapters themselves serve the research project.

Located in the IR discipline, the objective of this research is a qualitative exploration of IR conflict in the workplace. The basis for this study centres on the idea that IR conflict research has been preoccupied with the strike expression (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Whilst this approach is not reflective of the contemporary context (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005), the more salient issue is that this overly narrow focus has occluded our understanding of IR conflict: its nature, development, expression and impact (Hebdon & Noh, 2013). This author adopts the view that IR conflict is not simply a sole event but rather a complex and human process. However, the growing popularity of the quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach in IR research, "far less grounded in specific research contexts", is not well placed to address this significant gap in the discourse (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008:172). Rather, IR conflict must be researched in a way that recognises and accesses its complexity and richness. Edwards *et al.* (1995:287) write:

"... oppositional behaviour at the level of the workplace by its nature tends to be covert and difficult to uncover. To understand these practices therefore calls for research that has good access to the realities of life in a workplace..."

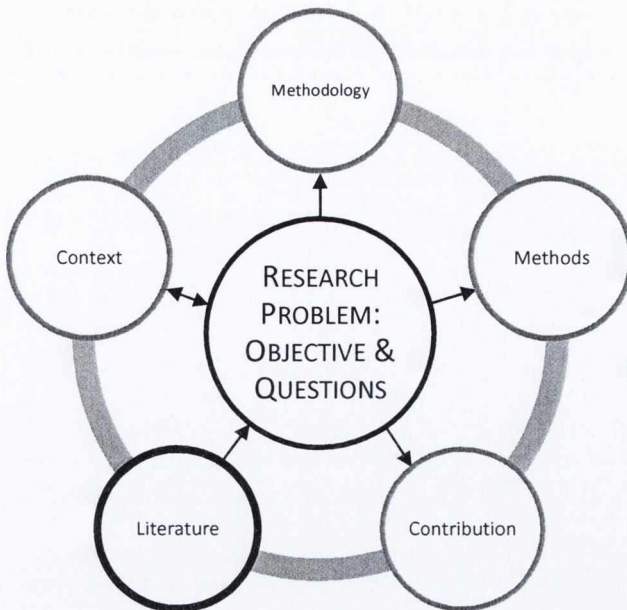
Drawing this chapter to a close, attention now turns to Chapter 2, the literature on IR conflict, and its role in informing the research questions and forthcoming study.





## CHAPTER 2

# THE EXPRESSION AND IMPACT OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT



### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, the study rationales identified in Chapter 1 are developed. Second, the chapter aims to identify and explore the areas for contribution in the IR literature and, third, provide an overview of literature used to inform the study, and the discussion presented in Chapter 8. In addition to these three objectives, this author wishes to consider what IR conflict is, and in doing so aims to improve the conceptual clarity of the concept. Specifically, this chapter seeks to propose a working definition of workplace IR conflict to be used in this research dissertation. To this end Section 2.2 introduces industrial relations; conflict; and the workplace with reference to key theoretical perspectives, a review of existing definitions and key characteristics of workplace IR conflict. This discussion will draw, where necessary, on broader organisational and conflict literatures.

Following this, Section 2.3 reviews developments in IR and IR conflict. This section introduces the Irish IR context before considering international and domestic patterns of IR conflict. In doing so, it identifies the first of two rationales supporting the broader exploration of IR conflict in the workplace: the strike may no longer be the most accurate indicator of workplace IR conflict. The second rationale, discussed in Section 2.4, is the central argument of the thesis: IR conflict is not a sole event. Building on these arguments, Section 2.5 provides an overview of literature on the non-strike expressions of workplace IR conflict before Section 2.6 considers, more broadly, the impact of IR conflict on the workplace. To conclude, the chapter revisits the basis for this study, the research objective and its underpinning research questions before synthesising the relevant literature into a conceptual framework to guide the forthcoming investigation.

## 2.2 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CONFLICT, AND THE WORKPLACE

This study is situated in the field of Industrial Relations (IR). In order to research the nature of IR conflict it is first necessary to consider the nature of IR, and make explicit the conceptualisation of IR adopted in this research study. Strauss and Feuille (1978:259) identify "... the difficulty of defining precisely what industrial relations is "where, as the central focus of IR undergoes transition, issues of conceptual ambiguity are faced. Clegg (1979:1) defines IR as follows:

"the study of the rules governing employment, together with the ways in which the rules are made and changed, interpreted and administered. Put more briefly it [IR] is the study of job regulation".

Clarke *et al.* (2008:2) offer a similar view and consider IR as a study of "the regulation, control and... governance of work and the employment relationship". These definitions emphasise regulation. One method of regulation is proffered by Flanders (1965) who defines the field as dealing with "regulated or institutionalised relationships in industry". In this regard, IR has focused on the regulation – or resolution – of conflict in the employment relationship through institutions, institutional relations and specifically collective bargaining (*ibid.*). However, Ackers (1994:38, 2002) argues that this has produced an overly narrow conceptualisation of IR. This critique is particularly salient amidst a decline in union membership, density, and the growing significance of the non-union workplace (Addison, 2014).

Kaufman (2008:316) argues that a broader conceptualisation of IR – focusing on all aspects of the employment relationship - is the original IR paradigm:

"The subject domain of the OIR [Original Industrial Relations] paradigm was the employment relationship. This included all manners of employment relationships - private and public, union and non-union, and formal and informal".

In contrast to an emphasis on collectivised labour and Trade Unions (Ackers, 1994), the OIR paradigm concerns both union and non-union relations inclusive of individual, group and collective cohorts. Despite these broad origins, a transition toward a narrower view emerged due to an ideological commitment to the Trade Union movement and its role in social democracy, and the prominence of practical issues including strike action (Kaufman, 2008). However, the purpose of this study is to explore IR conflict beyond the strike. Therefore a broader, or original, IR paradigm is adopted in this research dissertation. It is argued that the processes within the employment relationship of interest to IR inquiry extend beyond regulation. Ackers (1994: 38) writes:

"... industrial relations should concern itself with the employment relationship in every facet. In short, it must cover the full panoply of relations between employers or managers and the people they pay to work for them".

However, Strauss and Feuille (1978:275) argue that this approach is overly broad where including everything – from selection and equality, to the entire field of organisation behaviour – is "intellectually meaningless". Therefore, it is useful to distinguish IR from other related areas of inquiry. IR as it is conceptualised here, is most concerned with relations between employer and employee, or representatives<sup>3</sup> thereof. Blyton and Turnbull (1994:38) argue that "[t]o focus on the employment relationship has the advantage of homing-in on the (material) relationship between employer and employee". While *employee* relations is inclusive of relations between employer and employee, and between employees, the *employment* relationship is predicated on exchange, and an employment contract - economic and psychological. This relationship is indeterminate and therefore contains cooperative and antagonistic elements (Sisson, 2008), or multiple interests (Lewin, 2001). Relations are further characterised by a power differential where employees defer, within reason, to the managerial prerogative as the basis for exchange. In addition to authority over directing work, employers wield greater control over the factors of production. Thus, the employment relationship is highly interdependent (Sexton, 1996) and power asymmetric (Barbash, 1979). In this regard, the study of the employment relationship, or 'work relations' (Edwards, 1986), is only concerned with horizontal relations that exist *between* employees insofar as they impinge on employer-employee relations. Kochan (1998:37) identifies this as a core assumption that distinguishes the [IR] field from related disciplines, and forms the basis of the ensuing section:

"Industrial relations theory starts from an assumption that an enduring conflict of interest exists between workers and employers in employment relationships".

### **Conflict in the Employment Relationship**

This research dissertation identifies conflict as a key feature of the employment relationship, and the study of IR. Margerison (1969:274) argues that conflict is "... the basic concept that should form the basis of the study of industrial relations". Similarly, Barbash (1979:652) states: "[c]onflict, latent or manifest, is the essence of industrial relations". There are a variety of IR paradigms relevant to the study of conflict. However, Godard (2014:2) states:

"Identification of distinctive perspectives on conflict (or industrial relations in general) is always something of a 'mugs game' because much depends on the choice of (often implicit) criteria for distinguishing perspectives. Even then, these perspectives tend to blur into each other, and attempting to identify their boundaries can be somewhat arbitrary".

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<sup>3</sup> Representatives may include managers, Trade Unions, formal or informal employee representatives, and legal representation. The relationship can also be direct and individual.

Keeping these overlaps in mind, three central paradigms are identified as pluralist, unitarist, and Marxist (Ackers, 1994). The pluralist paradigm on conflict focuses on power differences (Hyman, 1975; Lewin, 2001; Benderski, 2003); the separation of economic interests (Kochan, 1998); and the mixed motive conceptualisation of the employment relationship (Sheppard, 1992; Tjosvold, 1996; Lewin, 2001). It is assumed that conflict derives from the asymmetry of power between the employee and employer (Lewin, 2001) where each party holds legitimate, but sometimes divergent, interests (Godard, 2014). Consequently, the pluralist perspective considers conflict as enduring, legitimate, rational and functional (Jackson, 1977; Blyton & Turnbull, 2004; Rollinson & Dundon, 2007). Dubin (1957:179) concurs stating that conflict is a "fundamental social process". While moralistic and stability views of conflict may conceptualise conflict in a negative fashion, it is recognised as an inevitability of social interaction (ibid).

The Marxist paradigm also considers conflict inevitable, and focuses solely on the power imbalance discussed above. This radical view conceptualises conflict as a class struggle between labour and capital (Dubin, 1957; Fox, 1973). To recapitulate, Hyman (1975:23) captures it well:

"Between these two classes... there exists a radical conflict of interests which underlies everything that occurs in industrial relations".

In contrast to pluralism (see Table 2.1), the Marxist paradigm views power imbalance as deriving not just from the employer's control of assets but also from (i) the covert threat that employment could be withdrawn, and (ii) the role of political and legislative institutions in maintaining the unequal distribution of power. Budd (2008:5) explains, drawing on Kelly (1998), that "unlike the pluralist view in which employer-employee conflict is confined to the employment relationship, the critical perspective is that employment conflict is part of broader societal clash between competing groups". Thus, conflict in the employment relationship is perceived as an inevitable product of an exploitative capitalist system (Lansbury, 1988). Accordingly the role of unions is more broadly defined due to the assertion that exploitation extends far beyond the realm of employment (Hyman, 1975). As such, the purpose of unions is to act on behalf of employees in an effort to augment the wider system and redistribute the balance of power (Wallace *et al.*, 2004). Nevertheless by temporarily reconciling interests through the collective bargaining process, unions sustain the capitalist system (Marchington, 1982).

The third paradigm in IR is unitarism. The key distinctions, according to Corby (1992), between the unitarist and pluralist perspectives are (i) the perceived purpose and value of unions, and (ii) the legitimacy of conflict. In direct contrast to the pluralist paradigm, unitarism conceptualises conflict as irrational and illegitimate based on the inherent assumption that the interests within the

employment relationship are – or can be – aligned. This paradigm informs Human Resource Management (HRM) which is closely aligned to the Organisation Behaviour (OB) and Human Relations perspectives (see Lewin, 2001; Benderski, 2003). These perspectives conceptualise the role of managers “as a catalyst in the fusion process” (Labovitz, 1970:61). Table 2.1 sets out these comparative approaches

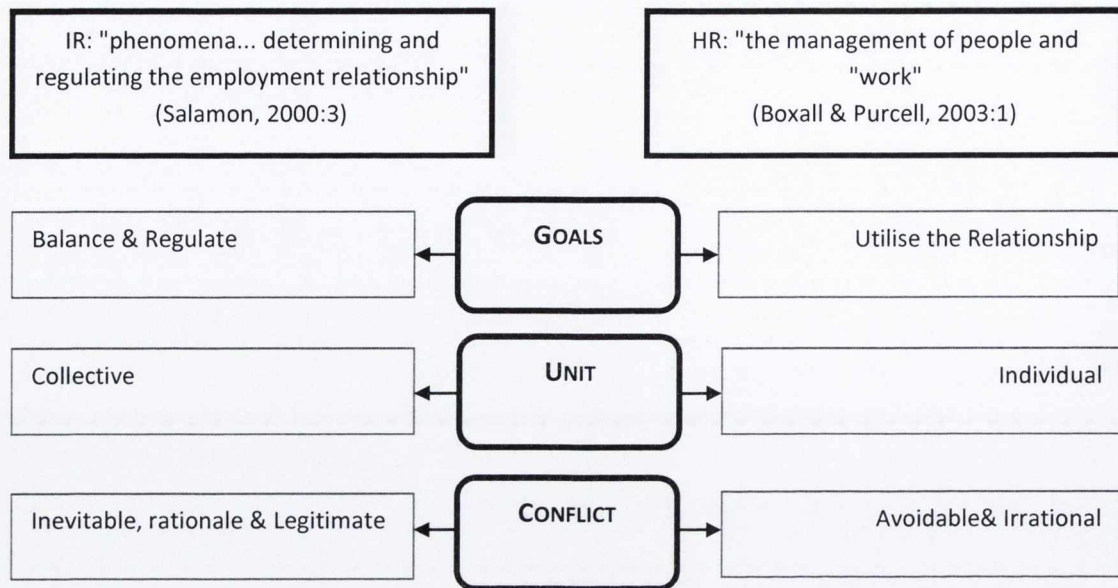
Table 2.1: Comparing IR Perspectives

	<b>Marxist</b>	<b>Pluralist</b>	<b>Unitarist</b>
<b>Assumptions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalist</li> <li>• Fundamental Divergence of Interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post Capitalist</li> <li>• Multiple Interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalist</li> <li>• Unified Interests</li> </ul>
<b>View of Conflict</b>	Class conflict perpetuated by capitalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inevitable</li> <li>• Rational</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irrational</li> <li>• Frictional sources</li> </ul>
<b>Resolution of Conflict</b>	Labour controls the factors of production to resolve conflict	Compromise	Coercion
<b>Management Role</b>	Exploitative	Recognise divergent interests	Set, and pursue, the managerial prerogative
<b>View of Unions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad</li> <li>• Redress the imbalance of power</li> </ul>	Legitimate role in managerial decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrusion</li> <li>• Undermines Cohesion</li> </ul>

IR, emerging in the 1920s (Kaufman, 2010) and gaining acceptance amongst the scholarly community in the 1950s, has since undergone peaks and troughs in its popularity with HRM its seeming competitor for academic endorsement (Lewin, 2001; Kelly, 2003). Indicative of a break between IR and HRM, the IR perspective is largely underpinned by pluralism and Marxism, while the HRM perspective is predominantly based on unitarism. Consequently, the IR and HRM perspectives, contrasted in Figure 2.1, differ most notably on their conceptualisation of conflict in the employment relationship. Simply put, the IR view proposes that conflict is a fundamental and enduring characteristic of the employment relationship. In contrast, HRM - viewing its *raison d'être* as fusing interests - considers conflict an avoidable phenomenon.

However, despite the differences between these two perspectives there are areas of conceptual overlap: IR concerns itself with the employment relationship (Ackers, 1994) while HR is the “management of people and work” (Boxall & Purcell, 2003:1). Further, Lewin (2001) notes that “both industrial relations and human resources focus on *conflict* in the employment relationship”.

Figure 2.1: IR and HRM - Conflicting Approaches?



A review of IR and wider organisational literatures on conflict reveals broad agreement surrounding the 'what' of conflict. It is agreed that conflict: (i) revolves around difference, disagreement or incompatibility (Fink, 1968; Jehn, 1997; Wall & Callister, 1995; Ayoko & Pekerti, 2008; De Dreu & Dijkstra, 2004; Gall & Hebdon, 2008), and (ii) involves interaction between multiple parties holding multiple interests (Sessa, 1996; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Robbins, 1978; Rahim, 2002; Chesler *et al.*, 1978). Therefore, conflict - IR or otherwise - is situated, to varying degrees, in a relationship (Sexton, 1996; Brett, 1984).

While many perceive IR and HR as incompatible, Abbott (2007) asserts that not only can the two fields coexist but expressions of IR conflict (e.g. absenteeism) are a HR concern and vice versa. More recently, in the Irish context, Cushen and Harney (2014:245) conclude that the 'structured antagonism' (Edwards, 1986:5) that characterises the employment relationship should be recognised where "HR stakeholders would be better served by research that helps them to appreciate and navigate, rather than deny, the plurality of interests that shape the employment relationship". Therefore, while this study is situated in the IR domain, both perspectives offer value. Lewin (2001) concurs:

"HR can still learn much from IR in analysing and dealing with conflict in the employment relationship. By the same token, IR can learn much from HR about the management and resolution of employment relationship conflict".

This study adopts the pluralist conceptualisation of IR where conflict in the employment relationship is considered inevitable and legitimate. As stated, this perspective considers employer-employee conflict as a product of power asymmetry (Kochan, 1998); interdependence

(Sexton, 1996; Blyton & Turnbull, 1994); and multiple interests (Lewin, 2001; Godard, 2014). In addition, the study is informed by multiple stakeholder theory (MST)<sup>4</sup>. A stakeholder is considered as individual(s) or groups who have an interest – contractual, financial, or political – in the decisions of an organisation (Geare *et al.*, 2006). It is suggested that, in order to understand the nature of conflict, scholars must pay attention to union, management, and government (Edwards, 1992). However, given the principal-agent issues that can arise (Colson *et al.*, 2014), employee(s) themselves also warrant attention where "[b]y almost any definition, employees are stakeholders in the firm" (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009:186).

Van Buren and Greenwood (2011:5) argue that "... industrial relations can benefit from understanding and integrating the increasingly ubiquitous stakeholder concept". However, multiple interests or 'stakes' (Edwards, 1986) are central, perhaps implicitly, in many IR writings. Budd (2004) considers the goals of the employment relationship as inclusive of employers, employees and society through its interest in efficiency, justice, and voice. In this regard IR – adopting a stakeholder perspective – considers the interests of the organisation; those it serves; and those working within it. Conversely, HR<sup>5</sup> adopts the stockholder perspective and is therefore charged with fusing interests, and the pursuit of organisational objectives (Clarke *et al.*, 2008).

The use of MST to acknowledge<sup>6</sup> the range of legitimate interests in the employment relationship is closely aligned with pluralist IR. Greenwood and Anderson (2009:190) state that "[a]cknowledgement of the possession of legitimate moral claims implies stakeholders rights to pursue their own interests and, as such conforms to pluralist ideology". Further, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) consider the relationship between stakeholder and organisation in terms of power, legitimacy, and urgency. In this regard, stakeholder theory is consistent with (i) the adopted conceptualisation of the employment relationship as power asymmetric, and (ii) the view that *both* employer and employee interests are legitimate. Similarly, Lamberg *et al.* (2008) explain that an organisation's survival is contingent on balancing stakeholder interests with organisational objectives. Therefore, stakeholder theory confirms the interdependent nature of the employment relationship. Finally, MST assumes that stakeholders mobilise in order to pursue their interests, and influence organisational decisions (Frooman, 1999). Therefore, stakeholder theory is relevant to the study of conflict (Galuppo *et al.*, 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> Zinn *et al.* (2001) highlight the value of the stakeholder perspective for assessing performance in a Medlab context. The use of a Medlab context for the purposes of this study is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>5</sup> A notable exception here is Tsui (1987) who, in exploring the effectiveness of the HR department, proposes a multiple constituency approach.

<sup>6</sup> Stakeholder theory, related to corporate social responsibility, can be a normative framework (Van Buren & Greenwood, 2011). This is consistent with the broadly defined concerns of IR in general, and Marxian analysis in particular.



Attention now turns to the focus of this investigation: workplace IR conflict. The section provides a discussion of conceptual clarity which will inform a working definition used in the remainder of this research dissertation.

#### WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT

Whitfield and Strauss (2008:176) note that IR studies consider many different levels ranging from "the individual worker; the workplace; the enterprise, firm, industry, or country; or the entire world". The emphasis on a macro approach of systems theory, and collective bargaining has achieved dominance for several decades (Larouche & Audet, 1992). However, Kochan *et al.* (1984) challenged this view, arguing that this focus emerged at the expense of other key aspects of employer-employee interaction where "much of industrial relations decision-making... had shifted to the level of the shop floor" (Larouche & Audet, 1992:27). Against a backdrop of decentralised pay bargaining, there has been a renewed interest in workplace issues (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008). This is evidenced in the emergence of large-scale workplace surveys (*ibid*), and, in Ireland, the recent workplace orientated reform of IR institutions.

This study is concerned with IR Conflict in the workplace which is defined as "the setting in which work is performed" (Masters & Albright, 2002:14). Callus and Lansbury (1988:364) state:

"[t]he relationship between capital and labour is defined at the point of production and it is the nature of this relationship that gives rise to the institutions and structures that are so often the concern of industrial relations writers...".

These authors conclude that "[w]hile the subject matter of industrial relations covers a broad canvas, its *essence* is to be found in the workplace" [emphasis added]. Edwards (1992) concurs stating that a shop floor perspective is 'particularly pertinent' in the study of industrial conflict. Thus, in researching the nature or 'essence' (Berg, 2009) of IR conflict, the workplace provides an appropriate setting<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Defining Workplace Industrial Relations Conflict**

There is agreement among IR theorists that a definition of IR conflict is required (Hebdon & Stern, 1998; Thomas, 1992; Singleton *et al.*, 2011). However, much of the IR literature assumes an understanding and avoids defining the concept. Turkington (1975:7) notes that "many studies of industrial conflict seek to avoid... [the]... problem of definition by giving no definition at all", resulting in "diverse meanings" of IR conflict. It may be argued, due to the practical and philosophical difficulties that arise in defining IR conflict, that it is best to move beyond

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<sup>7</sup> The choice of the workplace as the setting for this investigation is considered further in Chapter 4.

conceptual debates toward more interesting, empirical research. However, research – and its fit (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) – requires that authors be explicit about their assumptions. Thus, while no definition will be accepted by all readers, providing a definition allows for the assessment of research within the adopted conceptualisation, where – leaving aside philosophical or theoretical divergences – we can evaluate consistency in approach.

In reviewing definitions that are provided, Schmidt and Kochan (1972) identify two limitations: value-laden definitions, and overly-broad definitions. The first limitation centres on the incorporation of normative value judgements into definitions of the construct. This reflects unitarist tendencies to view conflict as aberrant. Ackroyd (2008:3) notes that "conflicting behaviour is perhaps most frequently labelled 'organisational misbehaviour'". Haddigan (1996a:14 cited in Bishop, 2004) defines conflict as the "actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people resulting in unwanted stress or tension and negative feelings between disputants". Schmidt and Kochan (1972:359), adopting a pluralist perspective, argue that definitions should avoid using "value laden terminology to be useful for analytical purposes". While there is scope for a worthy and informative debate regarding the value of conflict (see De Dreu, 2008), individual theoretical and philosophical perspectives "should be treated separately from any conceptual definition" (Schmidt and Kochan, 1972:360).

The second limitation relates to the very purpose of a definition: clarity. An overly broad definition is therefore of limited value. Dahrehndof (1959 cited in Schmidt & Kochan, 1972:360) defines conflict as "all relations between sets of individuals that involve an incompatible difference of objective". Related to this issue, some authors fall foul to tautology and use the term 'conflict' to define IR 'conflict' (e.g. Turkington, 1975:7).

Conversely, a definition of IR conflict can be overly narrow by including a list of specific expressions thereby confining the definition to a particular context or time. This author is guided by Bishop (2004:5)<sup>8</sup>:

"I am using the term conflict in a deliberately broad manner intended to encompass a continuum of events and interactions, from minor to major, that the participants themselves define as having involved some form of conflict... I did not wish to constrain my participants, but rather free them to use their own definition and describe their own experiences".

Another area of concern is the stringent focus on incompatibility between parties to IR conflict. Brett (1984) explains that incompatibility of goals or interests is a core feature in definitions.

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<sup>8</sup> Allowing participants to define what constitutes expressions of IR conflict and how these in turn impact on the workplace is consistent with the Phenomenological approach. See Chapter 4.

However, the employment relationship contains interests that are both antagonistic and cooperative. The pluralist paradigm assumes that there is the *potential* for incompatible goals but also a significant level of interdependence between the parties (Sexton, 1996). Godard (2011:284) highlights that the sources of conflict inherent in the employment relationship "stand in contradiction" to the sources of peace, or cooperation. Thus, definitions presenting an outright incompatibility of interests fail to recognise the structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986) in the employment relationship.

Despite these limitations, some authors provide useful conceptualisations. Banaji and Hensman (1990:135) explain that conflict is "seen as part of a bargaining process" where it belongs not to the workplace but rather its phenomenological and subjective experience. Writing from an IR perspective, Turkington (1975:7) states:

"Conflict exists when potential positions of parties are incompatible. In other words it is a relationship between parties where parties have incompatible goals. Industrial [relations] conflict is that conflict arising out of the employment relationship".

Dubin (1960:501) offers a narrower conceptualisation, focusing not on difference but rather on force to override difference: "[c]onflict may be defined as the actual or threatened use of force in any continuing social relationship". In this instance, "force is the attempt to override opposition by an act designed to produce injury to the other party" (ibid).

Many authors (Kessler & Weekes, 1971; Roche & Teague, 2010; Gall, 2013) in the IR field use the terms 'conflict at work' and 'workplace conflict'. In some instances these terms include horizontal, or employee-employee relations. Roche and Teague (2010:7) define workplace conflict as "differences of view and conflict between individual employees and their employer; among individuals; and between groups of employees, whether unionised or not, and their employer". Similarly, Gall and Hebdon (2008) explain that 'conflict at work', while normally considered as conflict between employers and employees also includes conflicts between managers and between employees. However, in keeping with the adopted conceptualisation of IR, this study is primarily concerned with employer-employee conflict. This is consistent with Hebdon and Noh (2013:27) who focus on "industrial relations workplace conflict between employees and management, and not upon organisational behaviour interpersonal conflict". Moreover, Edwards (1986:1, emphasis added), credited with the term 'conflict at work', states:

"This book is about work relations, and in particular the origins and nature of conflict within them. Work relations are the relations *between employers and employees* at the point of production which govern how work is carried out. They are a specific aspect of workplace behaviour: this study is *not* concerned with such features of this behaviour as

friendship groupings or the internal organizations of managements or workers except in so far as they impinge on work relations".

Similarly, Edwards (2003:17) situates the structured antagonism "between employer and employee". In line with Edwards (1986, 2003), this author remains cognisant that horizontal relations 'impinge' on employer-employee conflict. This occurs in a variety of ways. Employment is often a collective activity where employees work in groups, belong to Trade Unions and/or professional associations (Sisson, 2008). Therefore, horizontal relations contribute to the social context of the workplace, and the solidarity of the workforce. In addition, management retain the power of remedy (Gall & Hebdon, 2008) regarding disputes at the horizontal level. Thus, a dispute between colleagues quickly impacts on the employment relationship when management are called on to adjudicate, provide a safe working environment, or allocate work equitably. However, horizontal relations are not subject to the same level of interdependence (Sexton, 1996; Edwards, 2003) or power asymmetry (Benderski, 2003; Blyton & Turnbull, 1994; Larouche & Audet, 1992) that characterise the employment relationship. Barbash (1979:652), highlighting "tensions... of command and subordination", explains that "[c]onflict is the essence of industrial relations because industrialism necessarily generates stratifications which, in turn, necessarily generate tensions among those stratified". Thus, it is precisely these features of the employment relationship that trigger conflict (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994).

#### The What and How of Conflict

This study is concerned with employer-employee conflict. Therefore, we know the *who* of conflict. In defining the parameters of 'conflict at work' Gall and Hebdon (2008) consider '*conflict over what*'. This section concerns what workplace IR conflict is, and how it emerges. In addition, this section considers the philosophical and practical tensions of definitions, before presenting a working definition used in this research dissertation.

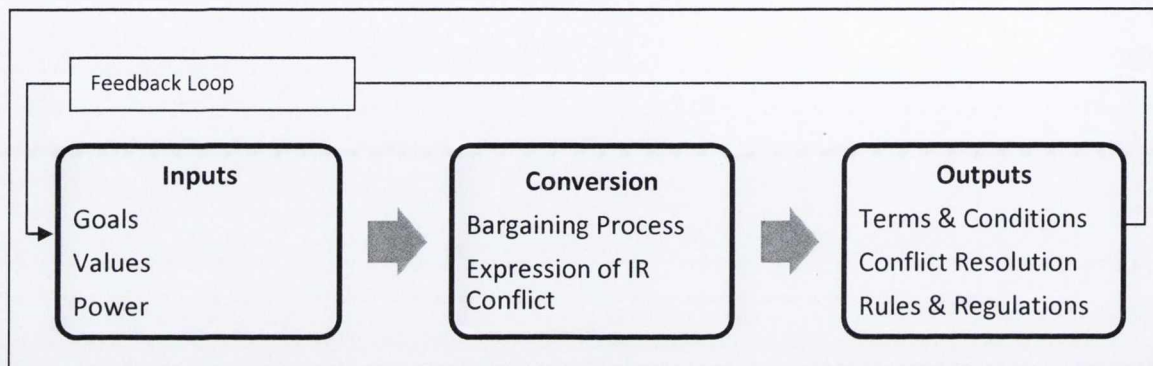
A review of IR and wider organisational literatures on conflict reveals broad agreement surrounding the 'what' of conflict. It is agreed that conflict: (i) revolves around difference, disagreement or incompatibility (Fink, 1968; Jehn, 1997; Wall & Callister, 1995; Ayoko & Pekerti, 2008; De Dreu & Dijkstra, 2004; Gall & Hebdon, 2008), and (ii) involves interaction between multiple parties holding multiple interests<sup>9</sup> (Sessa, 1996; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Robbins, 1978; Rahim, 2002; Chesler *et al.*, 1978). Therefore, conflict - IR or otherwise - is situated, to varying degrees, in a relationship (Sexton, 1996; Brett, 1984).

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<sup>9</sup> The use of Multiple Stakeholder Theory guides analysis. This choice is informed by the pluralist underpinnings of IR. However, it is also consistent with the multiple interests in conflict.

Authors also agree, within and beyond the IR domain, that conflict is a process (Pondy, 1967; Wall & Callister, 1995). An IR view is offered by the Input-Output model which adopts a processual approach to the conversion of conflict into regulation (Salamon, 2000). Drawing on systems theory, Craig (1967, 1970, 1988) identifies three stages of conflict: inputs, conversion, and outputs. Craig's input-output model is presented in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Craig's Input-Output Model of IR Conflict. Adapted from Salamon (2000)



In this model, inputs refer to the goals, values, and power of the parties. A complex conversion process transforms these inputs into outcomes for the organisation, and the employee (Chaulk & Brown, 2008). The conversion process can include a number of mechanisms such as bargaining, third party resolution, or the expression of IR conflict (ibid, Craig, 1970). Outputs refer to agreement regarding the terms and conditions of employment, or the resolution of IR conflict (Craig, 1970). In addition outputs can influence actors by creating rules for future disputes, or impacting on future goals, values and power via a feedback loop (Chaulk & Brown, 2008). Employee morale, and reactions are also considered (Stringer & Brown, 2008). This highlights the indeterminate nature of the employment relationship and the role of trust.

From an organisational perspective, Pondy (1967) proposes the now classical model of conflict (Lewicki *et al.*, 1992). Pondy (1967) identifies five phases through which conflict emerges and progresses: (i) latent conflict, (ii) perceived conflict, (iii) felt conflict, (iv) manifest conflict, and (v) conflict aftermath. The latent stage of conflict refers to the antecedent conditions, or sources, of conflict including competition for scarce resources; differences in goals; and 'drives for autonomy' (Pondy, 1967). This latter form of latent conflict relates to the process of control where one party seeks to control another, who, in turn "seeks to insulate [them]self from control" (ibid:300). Perceived conflict relates to the cognitive states of the parties, and their recognition of a conflict situation. Pondy explains that "[c]onflict may sometimes be perceived when no conditions of latent conflict exist, and latent conflict may be present... without any of the parties perceiving conflict" (p.301). Moving from cognitive states to affective states, parties experiencing felt conflict

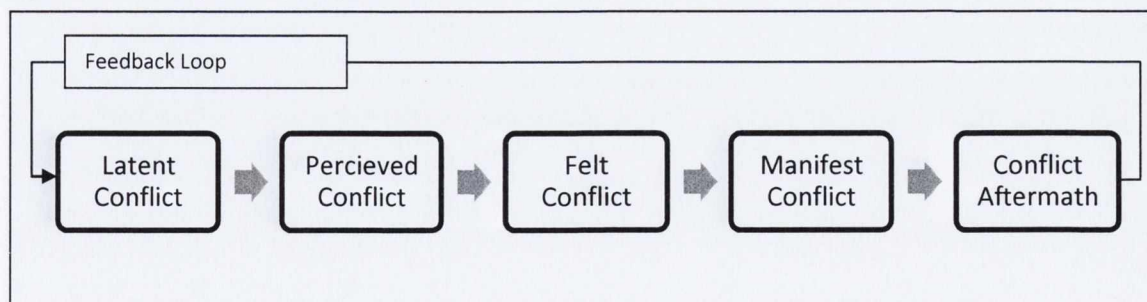
become stressed. Manifest conflict refers to conflict behaviour. It is explained that manifest conflict may emerge as overt and dramatic but can also take more subtle forms. However, Pondy notes the difficulty in determining whether a pattern of behaviour is conflictful. In this regard, Pondy (p.303) explains that context is key where the identification of conflict behaviour is best left to participants:

"[K]nowledge of the organizational requirements and of the expectations and motives of the participants appears to be necessary to characterize the behaviour as conflictful. This suggests that behaviour should be defined to be conflictful if, and only if, some or all of the participants perceive it to be conflictful"<sup>10</sup>

The final stage in Pondy's model is conflict aftermath. This phase highlights that conflict occurs in a relationship where each conflict episode shapes the episodes which follow. Thus the 'legacy' of every conflict is experienced by participants in future conflicts. Figure 2.4 presents the stages of Pondy's (1967) model.

While Craig (1967) adopts an IR perspective, and Pondy (1967) an organisational conflict standpoint, both examine the process, and stages of conflict. The most central divergence relates to the legitimacy of conflict. Pondy (1967) conceptualises conflict as inevitable, and potentially constructive. However, the model views conflict as an aberration in a cooperative system (Sheppard, 1992). This departs from the pluralist underpinning of Craig's model. However Pondy (1992) rescinds this assumption, suggesting that an organisation is "precisely the opposite of a cooperative system" where occasional cooperative episodes emerge. Nevertheless, the two models are complementary. Inputs in Craig's model can be considered as latent conflict. Similarly, outputs are consistent with the aftermath of conflict. By integrating the remaining stages, Pondy (1967) serves to explicate the conversion stage highlighted by Craig (1967).

Figure 2.4: Pondy (1967) Stages of Conflict



<sup>10</sup> This view, indicative of Bishop (2004), is consistent with the phenomenological approach. It also provides a rationale for focusing on conflict expressions, as defined by participants, rather than the antecedents of conflict. This issue is considered further in Chapter 4.

While agreement exists regarding the processual nature of conflict (Craig, 1976; Pondy, 1967; Wall & Callister, 1995), authors diverge on which stages should be included in defining conflict. Lewicki *et al.* (1992) note that several authors devote varying degrees of attention as to whether a definition should be inclusive of goals or actions (George & Jones, 1996; Rahim, 2002); latent or manifest conflict (Hill, 1982; Kerr, 1954; Pondy, 1967; Fink, 1968); or cognitive states (Pondy, 1967; Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Moderating this debate, Rahim (2002), drawing on Baron (1990), argues that incompatibility must meet a "threshold of intensity". Similarly, Jaffee (2007) explains that, drawing on Brehm and Brehm's (1981) concept of reactance, a significant threat will motivate action. In this regard, there is a pressure point between felt conflict and manifest conflict (Pondy, 1967) where parties reach a threshold of intensity or reactance.

Essentially these debates centre on when conflict exists. Ultimately it must be decided whether incompatibility itself is sufficient for the existence of conflict, or whether it hinges on the parties' realisation of incompatibility, and/or their subsequent action. Further complexity arises upon considering whether the parties perceive an incompatibility that is not based in an 'objective' reality<sup>11</sup>. These issues present philosophical and practical challenges to the study of conflict and as such will inform the definition of workplace IR conflict used in this study.

#### Workplace IR Conflict: A Working Definition

This research dissertation conceptualises conflict in the employment relationship as a social phenomenon subject to the nuances and subtleties that characterise all other relationships. Kornhauser (1954:62) writes: "[i]ndustrial conflict is human conflict". However, IR conflict as it is considered here has two defining characteristics. First, owing to the indeterminate and mixed motive nature of the employment relationship, parties to IR conflict are highly interdependent. Sexton (1996:274) writes "[c]onflict in Industrial Relations is *unique* in that it exists, expresses itself, takes place and is resolved in a context of interdependence between the parties"<sup>12</sup> [emphasis added]. Second, "the employment relationship is necessarily an *authority* relationship" (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994:38). Therefore, conflict in the employment relationship is subject to a greater power asymmetry than broader forms of organisational or workplace conflict. Benderski (2003:647) explains that OB theorists "focus primarily on horizontal conflicts – between peers or workers, managers, or professionals in which hierarchical power differentials are not especially salient". Conversely, hierarchical power differentials are central in IR conflict (Hyman, 1975;

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<sup>11</sup> The philosophical stance in this project, presented in Chapter 4, adopts a subjectivist, social constructivist approach to reality. Therefore the existence of conflict is defined by participants.

<sup>12</sup> It is recognised that Sexton (1996) may be overstating by terming IR conflict unique in the context of interdependence where all conflict arises due to some level of dependence (Emerson, 1962; Brett, 1984). However, this view highlights the centrality of interdependence in the employment relationship.

Lewin, 2001; Godard, 2011, 2014). Drawing on this conceptualisation of IR conflict, and the review of existing definitions provided, this author proposes the following definition of workplace IR conflict:

'Workplace IR conflict is defined here as the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment'.

Bain and Clegg (1974:96) write: "[a] definition cannot by its very nature be 'right' or 'wrong'. It can only be more or less useful for the purposes of analysis". The definition above specifies the boundaries of the concept in terms of employer-employee relations, and the interdependent and power asymmetric nature of these relations as defining characteristics. At the same time the definition does not make value judgements, nor does it specify the behaviours used to express workplace IR conflict (see Schmidt & Kochan, 1972). In line with Bishop (2004) and Pondy (1967), this open definition – consistent with phenomenology – is broad enough to reflect divergent interpretations and experiences of workplace IR conflict. Further, the definition refers to frustration of 'an important<sup>13</sup> concern or goal'. Therefore no systemic incompatibility is assumed and the cooperative elements of the employment relationship are not precluded.

Of particular interest is whether a definition of workplace IR conflict should focus on actions of opposition, or include latent antecedent conditions. While the pluralist conceptualisation of IR conflict highlights the latent tensions in the employment relationship (Barbash, 1979), latent conflict resists operationalisation, and as such poses practical obstacles to research. Therefore, it is suggested that an action-centred definition is more suitable in meeting the research objective. Further, Thomas (1992:268) argues that definitions which incorporate "deliberate interference" are more consistent with the IR perspective. However while action-centred, this definition incorporates cognitive states. Thus, in line with Pondy (1967), if a perceived (rather than actual) incompatibility results in conflict behaviour then, based on an action-centred conceptualisation of conflict, conflict exists<sup>14</sup>.

The proposed definition is not intended as a resolution to any of the theoretical or philosophical issues that surround IR conflict definitions. Rather, it is intended that this definition clarifies the conceptualisation of workplace IR conflict in this study. Attention now turns to developments in IR and IR conflict in the Irish and international context.

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<sup>13</sup> By focusing on an important concern or goal as the substance of conflict, the study is cognisant of Rahim (2011) and the threshold of intensity.

<sup>14</sup>This is consistent with the subjectivist orientation of this research.



## 2.3 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND CONFLICT: DEVELOPMENTS IN CONTEXT

The focus of this study, workplace IR conflict, has been introduced. In this section, recent developments in IR and IR conflict are considered and the first of two study rationales is discussed.

### THE IRISH CONTEXT

The Irish system of IR, traditionally conceptualised as voluntarist and adversarial (Doherty, 2013), has undergone a number of significant developments in recent years. In the midst of what Teague and Roche (2014:176) term the 'Great recession', the corporatist innovation (Baccaro, 2003) – previously prized with the Celtic Tiger – has collapsed.

In operation for over 20 years since its creation in 1987 (Hastings *et al.*, 2007) the Social Partnership system operated on the basis of a quid-pro-quo, “trading off wage moderation, fiscal restraint and tax concessions” for industrial peace and stability (Wallace *et al.*, 2004; Doherty, 2011:10). This corporatist model, unique to the Irish system, is said to have “fascinated and befuddled in equal measure” due to Ireland’s historically adversarial industrial relations (Doherty, 2011:3). Indeed D’Art and Turner (1999) explored the idea that, in the context of social consensus achieved at national level through Social Partnership, the adversarial model of IR traditionally representative of the Irish system had declined. Thus, Social Partnership was credited with industrial peace and economic triumph. Doherty (2011:3) notes:

“The Irish social partners could riverdance gaily high above the choppy waters of industrial conflict and political division, safe in the knowledge that the safety-net of social partnership would catch them should they happen to misstep”.

Bacarro (2003) notes the 'big' economic success of Social Partnership where real Gross Domestic Product, GDP, grew by 132% in Ireland between 1988 and 2000 compared with 45% and 32% for the US and EU respectively for the same period. In 2007 disaster struck. The Great Recession, and its Irish variant (McDonagh & Dundon, 2010), emerged. The tiger died, and was buried alongside Social Partnership's 'new clothes'. McDonagh and Dundon (2010:2) argue that the current economic crisis highlighted the “inability of voluntarism to adequately protect workers and other vulnerable sectors of Irish society”. In short, recessionary pressures and the related fiscal crisis prohibits the use of pay increases or tax cuts to illicit cooperation from the employee and employer groups. Doherty (2011:3) notes “the events of the past couple of years following the financial and social crisis that has gripped most of the Western world have brought the Irish social partnership juggernaut crashing to a halt amid widespread disillusionment and increasing recrimination”. This is evidenced in increasing levels of distrust toward Trade Unions in Ireland

following economic collapse (Culpepper & Regan, 2014). However, Culpepper and Regan (2014:2) identify a broader change in government policy arguing, in the context of the Irish and Italian cases, that governments do not need Trade Unions anymore:

"[S]ocial partnership has collapsed because trade unions in these countries have nothing to offer policymakers: they cannot strike fear into the heart of government or employers through industrial action; and they cannot develop and sell broad reforms to their members... Unions have neither the carrots with which to attract governments to incorporate them into policymaking nor the sticks with which to compel their inclusion".

Despite the absence of a national pay agreement for the first time in 20 years, Roche (2014:46) notes that collective bargaining was decentralised in an "orderly manner" through cooperation between the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). Meanwhile the Irish state relinquished its role, or part thereof, as the dominant actor (Dunlop, 1958) in industrial relations.

#### **Public Service Agreements: A Reprieve for Partnership?**

In 2010 public sector unions and government embarked on establishing the rules of a new relationship with the Public Sector Agreements (PSA 1 & 2) commonly referred to as the Croke Park Agreement (Doherty, 2011) and the Haddington Road Agreement (Roche, 2014). The first of these agreements held that<sup>15</sup> no more pay cuts and no compulsory redundancies would be issued for four years in exchange for a reduction in public sector employee numbers. The second agreement, PSA 2 included provisions for an increment freeze, pay reductions for salaries over €65,000, additional hours, greater emphasis on compulsory redeployment, and exceptions to the protection against compulsory redundancy (PSA 2, 2013-2015).

Key areas of focus in these agreements have included: performance management; labour mobility and redeployment; service integration and reconfiguration; cost containment; and reform including public service modernisation in existing agreements (PSA, 2010-2014:4-5, PSA, 2, 2013-2016)<sup>16</sup>. Reminiscent of the exchange relation pursued in Social Partnership, PSA 1 agreed that while public service numbers were reduced this would be implemented through voluntary initiatives, and that the "... Government gives a commitment that compulsory redundancy will not apply in the Public Service..." (ibid:3). While PSA 2 confirms this provision, some exceptions are noted including non-cooperation with redeployment. The parties stated that they:

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<sup>15</sup> This agreement followed the provisions contained in the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act (2009-2013).

<sup>16</sup> Many of these provisions, and others in PSA 1, are relevant to the tracer issue employed - the Laboratory Reconfiguration and Modernisation Strategy and as such will be considered further in Chapter 4.

"recognise the importance of stable industrial relations and are committed to maintaining a well-managed industrial relations environment to minimise disputes affecting the level of service to the public" (PSA 1, 2010-2014:9).

Against this turbulent economic backdrop of shifts from bust to boom - and back - IR in Ireland faces significant challenges where, at various levels, employees and employers are renegotiating their dynamic to pursue reform, and ultimately survival. Harney and Monks (2013) explain that, exhibiting "the largest compound decline in gross national product... in any industrialised economy over the 2007-2010 period" presents Ireland, once again, with the challenge of independence. Similarly, public service employments, constrained by an ongoing fiscal crisis, face challenges of recruitment embargoes and reform agendas subject to IMF and ECB scrutiny. These and other authors (Roche *et al.*, 2011; Russell & McGinnity, 2014; Teague & Roche, 2014) note the difficulty of managing people in the current Irish climate. In line with this view, Russell and McGinnity (2014) identify an increase in work pressure in Ireland between 2003 and 2009 attributing this trend to the 'deep recession'.

These issues, and the absence of a State-wide peacemaker, highlight the potential of a return to adversarial relations. Interestingly, however, despite this challenging backdrop, Roche (2014:47) states that "[t]he level of industrial conflict has remained at historically low levels and most of the conflict that has occurred has surrounded firms' closure plans or the terms of redundancies". This will be considered further with regard to the domestic and international patterns of IR conflict, however, first this research identifies other issues of change in the Irish system of IR.

### **Irish Industrial Relations: Voluntarism, Juridification, and Individualisation?**

In addition to the ongoing economic turmoil and its implications for IR in Ireland (Roche *et al.*, 2011) and abroad (Gall, 2010), authors have speculated on the changing nature of Irish Industrial Relations. Owing to its roots in the British IR system, Irish IR has traditionally been described as 'voluntarist' in nature (Doherty, 2013). The term voluntarism refers to "the freedom of the parties to organize themselves, to determine the nature and content of their relationship and to regulate it without governmental or legal intervention" (Salamon, 2000: 85). While some continue to consider the Irish system of IR voluntarist (Colvin & Darbishire, 2009; Labour Court, IR Dispute Investigation), others question its accuracy in light of the proliferation of individual employment legislation. Consequently, Browne (1994) posits the juridification of the employment relationship. Similarly, Teague (2005:124) notes that "virtually no aspect of the employment relationship is now completely free from regulation". This trend seriously undermines the applicability of the voluntarist concept to Irish IR. This view is supported by King (2007) who demonstrates a decline

of voluntary outcomes within Irish dispute-resolution machinery. Consequently, King (2007:158) concludes that Irish IR is now underpinned by "highly regulated and legislation based rule making".

Doherty (2009) explains that while there have been cries regarding the demise of voluntarism in the past, recent interest in the idea is fuelled by declining union density; an increase in non-recognition of Trade Unions; and a decline in industrial action. However, despite extensive individual employment legislation (Brown, 1994; Teague, 2005), evidence of the voluntarist tradition remains in the collective IR sphere. Specifically, despite union calls for statutory recognition (Roche, 2001; D'Art & Turner, 2003), Doherty (2013) explains that it remains far from their grasp. Turner *et al.* (2011:517) comment that "[d]espite two decades of social partnership, the [Irish] unions failed to gain any improvement in the legal environment for union recognition" signalling the 'paradox of partnership' (D'Art & Turner, 2011).

Arising from this, and other context features, there is a growing incidence of non-recognition in Ireland (Doherty, 2009). Gunnigle *et al.* (1997) concluded that the influx of individualist HRM in greenfield sites posed significant erosion of the pluralist, collective tradition. Despite the image of unions at the time as strong, Gunnigle *et al.* (1997) signalled the declining power base of unions, and a shift toward a more aggressive anti-union stance. In contrast, Roche (2001:200) found no evidence of a trend toward individualist HR practices in new versus existing sites, where collective workplace IR was considered independent of individualist HR practices. Instead, Roche (2001) identified a range of trends including individualisation in contingent conditions; non-HRM individualisation; and the interaction between individualist and collectivist practices.

The aforementioned decline in union density and industrial action combined with the proliferation of individual employment legislation has caused some to question whether Irish IR is undergoing a broader shift toward individualism where employees reject collective organisation and action (D'Art & Turner, 2002; Doherty, 2009). Pre-partnership demise, Doherty (2009) warned that the influence and presence of Trade Unions at the level of the workplace had waned, suggesting that this was moderated by the crucial role for Trade Unions at the national level. Demolition of the corporatist model, at least beyond public sector employment, signals new challenges for Irish Trade Unions. The Oireachtas Library and Research Service (No.4, 2011:1) notes that Irish Trade Unions face increasing pressure in a "radically changed industrial relations environment". More recently Doherty (2013:395) explains, drawing on Gall (2012), that Irish unions - like their UK counterparts - are "too weak to fundamentally alter the environment in which they operate". This view is echoed by Culpepper and Regan (2014) who argue that Trade

Unions have lost legitimacy amongst employees, and that this in turn has triggered change in government policy. This seeming decline in union influence may have implications for the level of adversarialism in the workplace, where D'Art and Turner (1999) conclude that the presence of an effective union can lessen the intensity of a 'them and us' divide. Thus, a decline - or perceived decline in union efficacy - may result in less favourable attitudes toward *management*.

Significant changes and challenges face Irish IR. While not particularly evident in the levels of strike activity, these issues signal the potential for discord in the employment relationship. Trade Unions, as the traditional route for the expression of such discord, are also facing challenges in terms of declining density (Turner *et al.*, 2011; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Roche, 2014) and a loss of influence at workplace and national levels (Doherty, 2013; Culpepper & Regan, 2014). Exacerbating these issues, recessionary pressures pose an ongoing, if not permanent, threat:

"The recession has debilitated trade unions and it may be that the current situation could have permanent negative consequences for trade unions in that they might be unable to recoup lost members and bargaining power when economic conditions improve" (Roche *et al.*, 2011:42).

These trends reflect similar changes on the international stage. The following section considers these, and the changing patterns of IR conflict.

#### CHANGING PATTERNS OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT

Despite recognition that IR conflict can manifest in a multiplicity of ways (Kerr, 1954), research has focused on the strike<sup>17</sup> as the "traditional yardstick of workplace relations" (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005:373). However, strike activity, has exhibited a sustained decline in the US (Bordogna, 2010); Australia (Healy, 2002); and Europe (Scheuer, 2006) including the UK and Ireland (Roche, 2014)<sup>18</sup>. This has caused some commentators to posit the 'withering away' of the strike (Ross & Hartman, 1960). Hebdon and Noh (2013:27) note that the "... singular focus on strikes has caused some scholars to misinterpret the decline in strike rates as evidence of the lack of workplace conflict". However, these authors, and others (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Roche & Teague, 2010) contend that this decline does not indicate the absence of conflict at work. Therefore, "strike activity may not be the most accurate indicator of IR conflict" (Cowman and Keating, 2013:372).

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<sup>17</sup> Gall & Hebdon (2008:597) define strike activity as "the collective withdrawal of the willingness to work" where the purpose hinges on the exertion of leverage, or 'pressure' (Clegg, 1976) on the employer.

<sup>18</sup> This research makes no prediction regarding the future of strike activity. Rather, the author contends that a singular focus is neither reflective of the contemporary focus, nor the complexity of the IR conflict phenomenon.

This decline presents against a backdrop of change in society (Scheuer, 2006), economy (Teague & Roche, 2014) and the world of work. Specifically, the reduction in strike activity may be related to IR trends including the juridification of the employment relationship (Browne, 1994; Dickens & Hall, 2006), the individualisation of IR (Gunnigle *et al.*, 1997; Scheuer, 2006), the introduction of state-provided dispute resolution machinery (*ibid*); and the decline of voluntarism (King, 2007; Estreicher, 2009). Other explanatory factors include a decline in Trade Union density (Visser, 1991; Kaufman, 2004) and the coverage of collective bargaining (Scheuer, 2006). It can be argued that these contextual changes may have influenced how employees respond to, and express IR conflict.

Godard (2011) concurs, explaining that changes in the context may have altered the feasibility of the strike expression. This signals that strike activity is, in part, determined by the perceived efficacy of strike action relative to other means of expressing discontent (Godard, 1992). Thus, the "declining utility of the strike" may be a key factor in explaining the decline of strike activity (Stern, 1964:60). Similarly, the cost of conflict – strikes or otherwise – may have increased due to societal preferences (Stern, 1964), increased workplace monitoring, performance management, and team incentives (Taylor *et al.*, 2010). Gall and Hebdon (2008) explain that individualist employment practices have increased individual risk which may undermine solidarity, shifting employees away from collective expressions of IR conflict. In this regard, capitalism and increasing managerial control may have quelled conflict (Godard, 2011).

Drawing on the substitutability hypothesis (Sabsford & Turnbull, 1994), IR conflict may have been redirected into non-strike expressions of IR conflict, or behaviours not typically associated with IR conflict. Godard surmises that IR conflict may have been "driven... underground... and become so deeply embedded that its manifestations are not recognized". Similarly, Saundry and Dix (2014:3) acknowledge that "conflict may be suppressed due to employee concerns over recriminations and job security, particularly in times of recession". Thus, the expression of IR conflict may have been channelled into more covert or individualist behaviours.

Drinkwater and Ingram (2005) find some evidence to support the redirection of strikes into more individualised expressions of IR conflict. These authors demonstrate that Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) cases and Employment Tribunal (ET) cases have exhibited a sharp increase for the same period of decline in strike activity. However Dix *et al.* (2008), finding the same increase, argue that this is indicative of an expanding ACAS remit, and that since these cases are individual the increase is insufficient to explain the dramatic decline in strike rates. More recently Saundry and Dix (2014:4) use the Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) to

"build a more accurate picture of the shape of individual conflict inside British workplaces". These authors conclude that "... while the UK has seen a decline in collective industrial action and British employment tribunals have experienced an upsurge in applications, broad assertions that this merely represents the individualisation of workplace conflict are too simplistic". However, national level survey data on non-strike expressions is limited and non-standard (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Therefore, we may not have the whole picture of conflict at work.

In review, strike activity has exhibited a sustained decline (Healy, 2002; Scheuer, 2006; Bordogna, 2010; Roche, 2014). Explanations for this decline suggest that "conflict at the workplace level is not so much being removed as reorganised and expressed in new ways" (Edwards *et al.*, 1995:284). Therefore, the first rationale underpinning this study is that researching IR conflict by focusing on the strike is not reflective of the contemporary context. This narrow view offers an outdated perspective on a central and 'ever-present dynamic' in the employment relationship (Gall & Hebdon, 2008).

#### **2.4 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT: A BROADER PERSPECTIVE**

Gall and Hebdon (2008:597) explain that "[t]he preoccupation of industrial relations scholars with strikes is well known". In reviewing existing literature, reasons for this interest can be identified. Perhaps owing to the problem-orientated roots of IR (Shalev, 1980), the strike is often considered most costly and therefore most "worthy of measurement" (Gall & Hebdon, 2008:597). However, non-strike expressions are also less *measurable*. Franzosi (1989:348) states "[t]he bulk of strike research has used quantitative methodologies, largely as a result of the ready availability of government data...". Gall and Hebdon (2008) acknowledge that some attribute the emphasis on strikes to the availability of data and the difficulty associated with researching other expressions. However, these authors, and others (Hebdon & Stern, 1998, 2003; Hebdon & Noh, 2013) explain that the underdeveloped state of theory on workplace IR conflict poses a more notable challenge to the study of non-strike expressions.

An alternative explanation for the focus on the strike can be considered in terms of change - in context and discipline. Edwards (1992:361) notes that "[i]ndustrial conflict went out of fashion as an explicit research focus during the 1980s". When conflict remerged on the research agenda, the IR context had changed in Ireland (Browne, 1994; King, 2007; Teague & Roche, 2014) and abroad (Scheuer, 2006; Dix *et al.*, 2008). These IR trends may have, as discussed, influenced the 'novel calculus' triggering "a more restricted use... of the strike" (Scheuer, 2006:143).

However, change was also emerging within the IR field itself. Kaufman (2004) documents that the scope of IR, previously broad, narrowed toward a focus on union-management relations. In this regard, the focus on strike action may stem from a change in subject focus where the strike is particularly salient for unions, and collective relations.

Further change within the IR discourse relates to methodology. Whitfield and Strauss (2008) explain that despite early traditions of inductive and context-specific enquiry, IR research has become increasingly deductive and quantitative. These approaches focus on measurement and identifying the extent of a phenomenon (Berg, 2009; Kumar, 2011). As such they are not well suited to exploring the 'less visible' and 'less measurable' expressions of IR conflict (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Moreover, the underdeveloped state of theory (Hebdon & Noh, 2013) may well be related to the shift toward the hypothetico-deductive approach where "facts are used to test theories, not to develop them" (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008:172). Conversely, the inductive and qualitative approaches, known for their strengths in (i) accessing less visible social phenomena, and (ii) theory development (Eisenhardt, 1989; Peshkin, 1993; Siggelkow, 2007; Berg, 2009; Pan & Tan, 2011) are now underutilised in IR research (Whitfield & Strauss, 2001, 2008). Offering a consistent view, Godard (2011:288) concludes that:

"... there is need of a more systematic effort at gathering evidence as to the manifestation of conflict. To this end, conventional quantitative research methodologies may provide a starting point, enabling us to identify the frequency of various forms of conflict in the workplace and exploring their covariates. But ...these methodologies are of limited value for tapping into many of the more subtle and hidden manifestations of conflict... and may be of inherently limited value for the study of conflict in general".

In explaining preoccupation with the strike we can point to a lull in research on IR conflict (Edwards, 1992) and changes in how employees express IR conflict (Scheuer, 2006); a narrowing of the IR discipline toward Trade Unions and collective employment relations (Kaufman, 2004); and a change in IR methodology favouring deductive theory testing, and quantitative methods (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008). While the focus on the strike – for problem-orientated or philosophical reasons is understandable – it nonetheless has limitations. First, as noted, the strike may no longer be the most accurate indicator of IR conflict. However, broader issues can be identified. This forms the basis of the following section which presents the second rationale underpinning this study.

#### GOING BEYOND THE STRIKE: WHY BOTHER?

It is widely acknowledged that IR conflict is not limited to the strike expression (Kerr, 1954; Godard, 2014). Sapsford and Turnbull (1994) recall the words of Kerr (1954:70) on industrial conflict: "its means of expression are as unlimited as the ingenuity of man". However, these



authors note that this awareness is "nowadays largely forgotten" (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994: 249). Three gaps in the discourse arise. First, Kolb and Putnam (1992:311) explain that conflict in organisations – as a human (Kornhauser, 1954), relational (Sexton, 1996; Brett, 1984), and interactive (Sessa, 1996) process (Pondy, 1967; Wall & Callister, 1995) – is often subtle:

"... conflicts are not always – or even typically – dramatic confrontations that achieve high visibility and publicity, such as strikes, walkouts or firings. Nor is conflict usually bracketed into discrete public events and sequences, where parties formally negotiate or involve officially designated parties in the resolution of their differences".

Consistent with this view, Gall and Hebdon (2008:589) argue that conflict at work is inclusive of more hidden tensions. Nevertheless, "only 'lip service' is paid to the less spectacular manifestations of conflict" (Kornhauser, 1982:13). Consequently, our knowledge of IR conflict is limited due to "the lack of detailed attention given to other forms of industrial conflict" (ibid). In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to individual and covert IR conflict expressions. Godard (2011:299) states that "there is need of a more systematic effort at gathering evidence as to the manifestation of conflict". This author concludes that "it is possible that new manifestations of conflict... have come to replace traditional ones" (ibid). Therefore by focusing on the strike, our understanding of *how* IR conflict is expressed is incomplete.

Second, the preoccupation with the strike has limited our knowledge of the nature of workplace IR conflict and its characteristics. In line with more general trends in IR (Roche, 2001), there has been much speculation regarding the individualisation of IR conflict (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Saundry & Dix, 2014). However, there has been insufficient research to uncover the contemporary characteristics of IR conflict (Godard, 2011).

Third, Hebdon and Stern (1998) argue that ignoring the array of IR conflict expressions has weakened our understanding of conflict dynamics and how employees choose between expressions of workplace IR conflict. More recently, Hebdon and Noh (2013:26) conclude that "[r]elatively little is known about the complex inter-relationships between the various expressions of workplace conflict" where the longstanding complementary versus trade off debate lingers on. These authors and others (see Margerison, 1969) highlight a related gap in the discourse regarding the development of IR conflict in the workplace where "more qualitative research is needed to understand how collective action develops".

Thus, quiescence aside, the more salient critique of the strike focus is that it limits our understanding of IR conflict: its nature, dynamics and multiplicity of expressions. As such, the value of researching IR conflict more broadly lies in an improved understanding of the concept as a dynamic and multifaceted continuum – not simply a sole event.

## THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT

Recently, Hebdon and Noh (2013: 43) state that "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace [IR] conflict itself". However, this issue has been longstanding in IR conflict literature. Margerison (1969:273) writes:

"... the formulation and application of rules is an important aspect of industrial relations, but it is by no means the central core. Insofar as this is Flanders' concept of industrial relations it narrows the scope of inquiry to the regulation of conflict. This is a very serious limitation, for it tends to ignore the essential element of all industrial relations, that of the nature and development of conflict itself".

This section considers the characteristics of workplace IR conflict, and the dynamics between expressions. However, the section first examines the role of context in influencing the nature of IR conflict.

### **The Nature of Workplace IR Conflict in Context**

Barbash (1979:646) writes that "[t]he nature of conflict in the industrial society is probably best understood in particular contexts". Similarly, Edwards *et al.* (1995) explain that context both external and internal shape the nature of conflict, and how employees express conflict:

"[w]orker opposition has to be placed in its historical economic and political context, for [its] nature and extent... are shaped by factors external to the workplace, such as shifting product and labour market conditions, as well as those internal to it, such as current managerial strategy and policy".

This study is concerned with IR conflict as it presents in the workplace. However, there are many levels in the study of IR (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008), and as such, multiple areas of context. Margerison (1969) distinguishes between the intra-organisation relating to IR in industry and national arenas, and the 'intra-plant level', concerned with the work task and job content. Adopting a macro, or intra-organisation standpoint, political, legal and economic spheres impact on the institutional environment; labour market; labour protections; and the provision of an IR institutions (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987; Edwards, 1992). The role of context in this regard is highlighted by the systems perspective on IR. Bain and Clegg (1974:91), drawing on the work of Dunlop, and Flanders, state:

"Industrial Relations [is] a social system composed of actors - workers and their organizations, employer-manager's and their organizations, and the state... interacting in a context composed of labour and product markets and the work place and social environments"

In discussing the macro context, Edwards *et al.* (1995:287) highlight the role of national culture. National culture influences norms regarding the expression and management of conflict where

covert forms of workplace resistance are "likely to take culturally specific forms which are difficult to unravel for 'outsiders'" (ibid:287). More recently, Weingart *et al.* (2014), drawing on Hall (1976), posit that a country's communication culture will determine the directness and oppositional intensity of conflict expression, and the involvement of third parties. According to this framework, conflict expressions occurring in a low context culture are direct. Conversely, expressions of conflict in high context cultures are embedded in rituals, language use, and non-verbal behaviours. This approach also involves third parties where disputants vent to friends or colleagues (ibid). National cultures also contain norms regarding the intensity of conflict expressions, where cultural norms shape acceptable levels of assertiveness (Weingart *et al.*, 2014). Applying Hofstede's (1980) dimension of masculinity-femininity suggests that masculine cultures will favour more assertive expressions, while a more passive approach may be preferable in feminine cultures. Similarly, Landau (2009) finds that power-distance influences whether an employee will use voice or remain silent. Thus the macro context can influence the characteristics, expression, and development – and third party resolution – of Workplace IR conflict.

The organisational, or intra-plant setting (Margerison, 1969) also contains a number of factors that shape the nature of conflict. This view is supported by Edwards (1992) who explains that the experience of industrial conflict differs between plants. Bain and Clegg (1974) argue that the foremost influencer of employee, union, and manager behaviour is the nature of job regulation. Similarly, Craig (1967) and Pondy (1967) identify the rules governing interactions as inputs or features of latent conflict. If conflict - and its counterpart, cooperation - are the essence of industrial relations, rules serve to organise these dimensions in the employment relationship (Barbash, 1979; Edwards, 2003). Edwards (2003) explains that a rule is "[a] complex social institution, not just a few sentences in a rule book. It can comprise of beliefs, ideologies and taken-for-granted assumptions as well as formal provisions of rights and obligations". This is consistent with Gelfand *et al.* (2012) who find that conflict cultures, as the norms dictating how conflict should be managed, influence how conflict is expressed. Four conflict cultures are identified, including dominating cultures which are predicated on win-lose dynamics and high levels of confrontation; and avoidance cultures where conflict is managed through evasion or suppression; passive-aggressive cultures where behavioural constraints result in low efficacy for managing conflict, and collaborating cultures featuring joint regulation (Gelfand *et al.*, 2008; Gelfand *et al.*, 2012).

Adopting a more formalised stance, Barbash (1979) focuses on the bargaining context of IR conflict. Ultimately, the bargaining process of IR is considered as the mechanism by which conflict

is resolved. Three levels of bargaining applicable to the organisation are identified: the level of the agreement; the formal and informal shop floor level; and the final labour transaction where the effort bargain materialises and all other agreements are implemented (ibid). Each level is associated with its own rule-making process which serves to resolve conflict in the bargain, and a sanction to induce agreement. The agreement establishes the broad rules for the price and conditions of labour which are implemented in subsequent transactions (Barbash, 1979). At this level, the locus of conflict is considered as the bargaining table and is most commonly associated with the strike sanction (ibid). The strike is considered central where, save the ability to threaten a strike or apply pressure (Clegg, 1976), "neither side can really bargain with the other" (Barbash, 1979:647). Bargaining on the shop floor is rule-bound by a grievance arbitration system. While this system extends the rule-making process beyond the initial agreement, Barbash warns that full completion of the [effort] bargain is continuous between the employee and their direct supervisor. He explains that sanctions, other than the strike, can be applied at this level both within and beyond the union remit. Union representatives can orchestrate limited forms of withdrawal including slowdowns, mass resignations, or a refusal to work overtime. Additionally, taken as distinct from "concerted action", individual employees "practice their own withholding to express discontent" (ibid:651). These practices, corresponding to informal work society, are often covert and embedded in the workplace context (Barbash, 1979; Edwards *et al.*, 1995).

Bain and Clegg (1974:111) argue that the rules are in turn "influenced above all by the characteristics of organization among employers and control systems within firms". A key concern in this regard relates to union status within an organisation. This can inform how conflict is expressed (Freeman & Medoff, 1984); the development of IR conflict (Hebdon & Noh, 2013); the level of formality in managing conflict (Teague & Doherty, 2011); and the tendency toward engaging third party resolution (ibid). Gall and Hebdon (2008) explain that the ability to express conflict is not automatic where employees, subject to poor power-dependency relations (Emerson, 1962), may avoid forming a Trade Union or avoid Union action. Collective expression of IR conflict requires the creation of a collective organisation; consideration of costs and benefits; identifying the opportunity to act; and consensus (Edwards, 2003). Edwards (2003:9) highlights the union's role with regard to mobilisation as "the degree to which unions identify common interests among their members, persuade their members as to what their interests are, and organise pursuit of the interests..." where members may, or may not, follow union direction. In this regard, the solidarity and empowerment of a collective is a key concern.

From the above, it is concluded that the rules governing behaviour will shape conflict. However, further complexity arises upon consideration of the heterogeneity of relationships. Kochan *et al.*

(1984 cited in Cappelli & McKersie, 1987) explain that the quality of relationships on the shop floor vary significantly even when covered by the same collective agreement. This disparity arises in the context of informal understandings; repeated interaction of the parties; and individual differences. The employment relationship itself, and specifically the nature of historical employer-employee relations determines the nature of conflict, and how it is expressed. This is captured by Craig (1967) and Pondy (1967) where outputs of conflict or conflict aftermath form inputs in future conflict episodes, and the expectations or affects (Stringer & Brown, 2008) of actors. Weingart *et al.* (2014) explain that the familiarity of the conflicting parties shape conflict expressions where disputants draw on previous interactions when predicting, and responding to, oppositional behaviour. The complexity of the rule-making process discussed above arises from the competing interpretations and interests of both parties. However, the indeterminate duration of the employment relationship is highlighted as the most central challenge (Edwards, 2003). In this regard rule-making is an evolving and ongoing process. Thus, previous interactions and the level of trust between the parties (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987) become key determinants of future conflict.

The nature and objectives of the organisation, and the work itself warrant consideration. Cappelli and McKersie (1987) assert that "one of the most important factors changing the system of industrial relations... is the strategies and decisions by management in response to a changing environment". If, as per the working definition, employer-employee conflict relates to work, working conditions, and/or the working environment, it follows that the nature of work and the work environment are key contingencies. A key factor in this regard relates to occupational culture. While Barbash (1979) links levels of agreements to loci of conflicts and particular sanctions, "workplace fiddles can grow out of and reinforce the traditions of specific occupations" (Edwards *et al.*, 1995:293, Lewin, 2008). Turnbull (1992) explains that the militancy associated with dockers was largely attributed to occupational culture. However, this group underwent such a transformation that they were unable to mount any form of resistance to attacks on their terms and conditions. The basis for this shift was the reorganisation of work through technology which served to individualise, mechanise, and routinise work (*ibid*). This reduced the number of employees while decasualisation tied remaining employees to an individual employer (Edwards, 1992). This demonstrates that the nature of the work and workplace technology can influence occupational culture and employee behaviour (Edwards, 1992). While research has focused on manual workers (Edwards, 1992), or more recently employees in call centres (Bain & Taylor, 2000; Mullholland, 2004; Townsend, 2005; Belanger & Edwards, 2013), research has largely overlooked informal employee sanctions amongst senior, managerial, and professional cohorts (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). These factors, the objectives of the organisation, the nature of the work, and

occupational culture(s) may produce differences in power and preferences. This can, in turn, influence IR conflict.

While IR literature has been charged with overlooking the individual in the employment relationship (Bain & Clegg, 1974), Kornhauser (1954:62) observes that "industrial conflict is human conflict". Authors from organisational disciplines argue that individual differences can impact on how conflict is expressed (Weingart *et al.*, 2014). Specifically, gender, personality, and communication skills can influence employee expectations and their behaviour regarding conflict in the workplace (*ibid*). Workplace IR Conflict is a perceptual process where interests can diverge. Therefore, beyond the quality of relations or the nature of work, the characteristics, perceptions, preferences, and values of the parties are also significant.

In review, IR conflict is shaped by context within and beyond the workplace. Key factors include macro forces and national culture (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987; Edwards *et al.*, 1995); rules for conflict management and the levels at which these rules emerge (Barbash, 1979); managerial objectives (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987); the quality of historical relations; the nature of the work (Turnbull, 1992); and the people who do it (Weingart *et al.*, 2014). These features are intertwined with the conflict process. Edwards (2003:29), drawing on Emmett and Morgan (1982), describes the walls of the workplace as 'a semi-permeable membrane' filtering outside influences and simultaneously shaping relations elsewhere. In this regard, while there are different levels of context associated with different cultures, rules, resolution mechanisms, and loci of conflicts, each level is interrelated. Thus the nature of IR conflict is context-specific<sup>19</sup>.

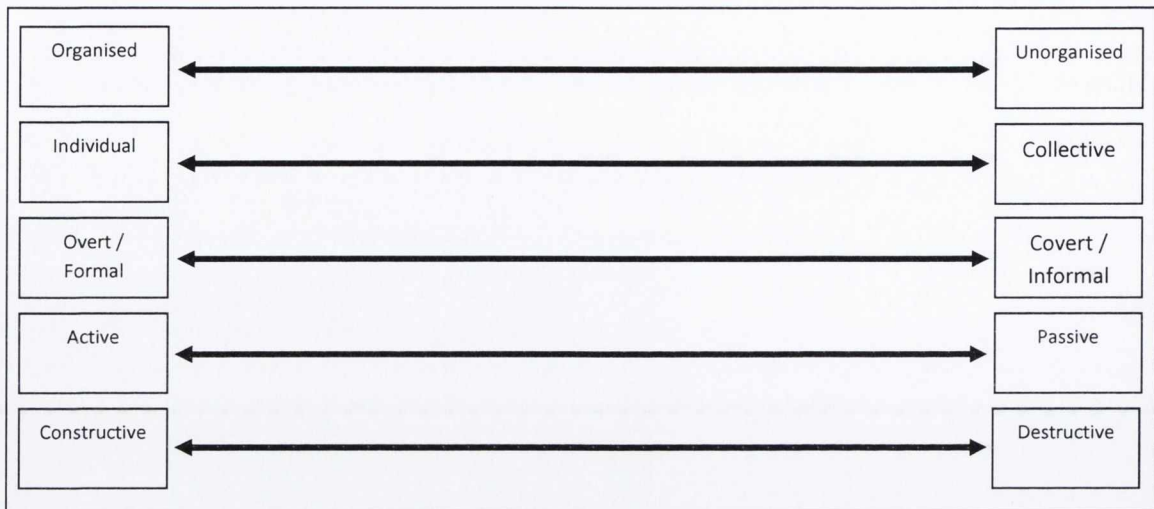
### **The Characteristics of Workplace IR Conflict**

A number of techniques are used to characterise expressions of IR conflict. Hebdon and Noh (2013) observe that authors often classify conflict expressions on spectrums: organised-unorganised (Fox, 1966); individual-collective (Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Edwards, 1986); overt-covert (Hebdon & Noh, 2013); active-passive (Rusbult & Lowery, 1985); and destructive-constructive (*ibid*). These dimensions, illustrated in Figure 2.5, are used to understand the underlying nature of an expression.

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<sup>19</sup> This informs the selection of the case study methodology which is recognised for being sensitive to the influence of context (Hartley, 1994; Yin, 2003).

Figure 2.5: Dimensions of Workplace IR Conflict Expressions

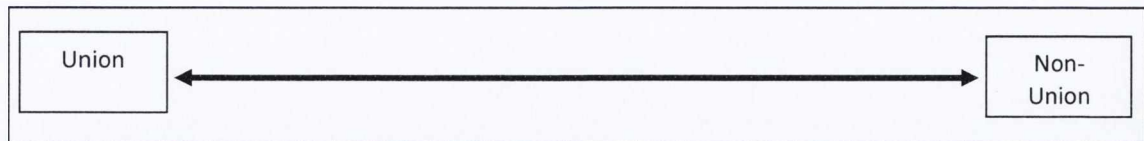


The organised-unorganised dimension is used to consider the degree to which expressions are coordinated. Similarly, the individual-collective dimension is used to assess the underlying social dynamics of an expression, and establish whether it is pursued by an employee, or a group of employees (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). These are useful distinctions. However, it is important to be clear on their meaning. Hebdon and Noh (2013) explain that organised conflict is traditionally taken to mean collective, indicating that collective expression is thought to be formally orchestrated in some way. Further, the terms organised and collective, when used in the context of industrial relations, are often taken as synonyms for unionised. However, in the context of declining union density (Scheuer, 2006; Doherty, 2013; Roche, 2014; Saundry & Dix, 2014), unions may not be involved in the expression of IR conflict. This does not dictate that all IR conflict expression beyond the union remit is unorganised and individual. Unions are neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the development of collective action (Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Rather, the absence of union involvement may reduce the *visibility* of conflict organisation, leading scholars to misinterpret expressions as unorganised and seemingly unrelated. However, Mulholland (2004) and Junor *et al.* (2009) find evidence to suggest that individual acts may be underpinned by tacit agreement. In this regard, Gall and Hebdon (2008:594) consider semi-collective characteristics of IR conflict where behaviours appear at "first sight as an individual conflict between a worker and management may be symptomatic of a wider collective conflict". Consequently, Hebdon and Noh (2013:44) conclude that "the industrial relations field may have to examine collective conflict in the non-union world".

This study will use the individual-collective dimension defined here as the degree to which action is *pursued* by individuals acting independently, versus a group of employees acting in-concert colluding on the expression of IR conflict, or how IR conflict is to be expressed (see Gall & Hebdon,

2008:594). In addition, rather than the organised-unorganised dichotomy which involves implicit understandings, a union–non-union dimension, presented in Figure 2.6, is considered.

Figure 2.6: The Union/Non-Union Dimension of Workplace IR Conflict



The overt-covert scale considers expressions in terms of their visibility (Hebdon & Noh, 2013). This relates to the extent to which (i) acts are concealed and/or (ii) where a particular behaviour can be attributed to IR conflict (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Consequently, this spectrum is related to the level of formality where formal expressions - involving articulation of opposition - are more overt. This is consistent with Weingart *et al.* (2014:7) who propose that expressions of organisational conflict can be categorised in terms of the directness of opposition as "the degree to which the sender explicitly versus implicitly conveys... opposition". However, rather than conveying opposition implicitly, some covert expressions may be purposefully concealed.

Finally, the active-passive dimension is considered as the degree to which a behaviour will impact on an action on a problem (Rusbult & Lowery, 1988). This relates to Weingart *et al.* (2014) dimension of oppositional intensity as "the degree of force" underpinning oppositional activity.

Some of these dimensions are useful thought-provoking devices. However, there are a number of caveats. First, some of the dimensions have implicit value judgements. The constructive-destructive is concerned with the positive or negative nature of impact (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). However, Gorden (1988) comments: 'constructive for whom'? In this regard, the characteristics of IR conflict are better addressed separately from the appraisal of their impact which must adopt some standpoint<sup>20</sup>. Thus, in keeping with the discussion of IR conflict definitions (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972), value judgements - particularly implicit ones - are unhelpful.

Second, it is important to recognise that these are spectrums. In this regard, expressions are unlikely to exhibit absolute characteristics. This is reflective of Gall and Hebdon (2008) who consider the semi-collective expression of IR conflict where behaviours are clustered toward poles of attraction. It should also be noted that employees may pursue a number of expressions at the same time. In this regard, a range of expressions characterised as non-union may be pursued in a unionised workplace and as such covered by collective agreements, and any collective expression

<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with the pluralist paradigm and multiple stakeholder approach adapted. The impact of workplace IR conflict is considered in Section 2.6 where an organisational, or workplace perspective is adopted. In this regard the study considers two sides of IR conflict: (i) how employees - rather than employers - express IR conflict, and (ii) how IR conflict impacts on the workplace - rather than employees.



of IR conflict underway. Therefore, union and non-union expressions of IR conflict can manifest simultaneously.

Finally, non-strike expressions can mean different things, and are pursued in different ways. Edwards (1992:382) explains that "workers' responses are likely to have been highly variable" where, arising from the role of context and the negotiated order of the workplace, seemingly similar behaviours have different social meanings. Therefore it must be recognised that the same expression can be characterised differently depending on *how* it is enacted.

### **The Dynamics and Development of Workplace IR Conflict**

Owing to the narrow focus on the strike, theory regarding the dynamics and development of IR conflict in the workplace is underdeveloped. Hebdon and Noh (2013:43-44) explain that "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace conflict... [therefore]... [s]tudies need to focus upon the dynamics between different forms of expression". In this section, existing frameworks are considered.

#### **Balloons and Icebergs**

Sapsford and Turnbull (1994) indicate that IR conflict expressions can be considered as balloons where suppression of one expression leads to an increase in another. This corresponds to Gall and Hebdon's (2008:592) concept of method displacement where "if workers are less able to strike then there is likely to be, all other things being equal, a relative growth in the expression of grievance by other means". This, however, assumes that the level of IR conflict is fixed (Hebdon, 2005). Therefore, the testability of the hypothesis is limited. Godard (2011) notes that there is evidence of a trade-off where use of the strike expression was directly suppressed. In this regard there has been some evidence of substitution (Godard, 2011). However, this has been limited to contexts with no-strike laws (Hebdon & Noh, 2013).

Alternatively, the iceberg, or complementary, hypothesis proposes that expressions of IR conflict are complements. This perspective considers the strike, or overt expressions, above the water line while covert expressions are found below. Thus an increase in one expression indicates an increase in others (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994). Hebdon and Noh (2013) note that there is also evidence to support this hypothesis where employees using grievance-filing exhibit a higher rate of absenteeism than non-filers. Conversely, a reduction in overt activity signals a reduction in all other expressions, and perhaps a reduction in the instances of impasse (Godard, 2011). Thus the decline in strike activity, according to this view, signals the demise of conflict at work. However,

many authors agree that conflict continues (Hebdon *et al.*, 1999; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Roche & Teague, 2010; Godard, 2011, 2014).

#### Escalation

Hebdon and Noh (2013) have recently presented and quantitatively tested a theory of conflict development. This model finds evidence to support the notion that a strike is unlikely to emerge without antecedents: "... after choosing voice over exit, worker dissatisfaction starts with grievances and is then followed by softer forms of collective action such as working-to-rule or slow-down" (ibid:44). These collective actions are in turn positively associated with strike action. Thus, this work counters the spontaneity thesis (Darlington, 2006) by indicating that strikes are unlikely to emerge without a build-up period (ibid). Similarly, Bean (1975) argues that voluntary absenteeism, turnover, and tardiness have the same triggers as strike action<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the strike may be accompanied or preceded by other forms of IR conflict (Turkington, 1975). Escalation theory, somewhat consistent with the complementary hypothesis, suggests that expressions are positively correlated in a step-by-step pattern (Hebdon & Noh, 2013).

#### Exit-Voice

Hirschman (1970) provided perhaps the most influential framework on the dynamics of, and responses to conflict. The Exit-Voice framework originally sought to establish why some dissatisfied people "stay and fight rather than switch" (Lewin & Mitchell, 1992:95). According to Hirschman (1970), parties respond to 'decline', or conflict, in one of two ways: exit or voice. Loyalty is considered the main intervening variable where loyal employees who are 'attached to the firm' are more likely to choose voice over exit. Hirschman also references the viability of exit, and the ability to influence change. As such this perspective can be integrated with compensating differentials theory (Ichniowski & Lewin, 1986 cited in Lewin, 2008) which asserts that employees compare the relative costs and effectiveness of quitting and grievances.

However, Hirschman's work was developed with broad applicability relating to employees, consumers and citizens. Consequently, the power imbalance and interdependence that characterise the employment relationship (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994) and IR conflict (Sexton, 1996) are not addressed. Power asymmetry and interdependence do not apply in the same way to consumer-producer relations. Therefore, in Hirschman's framework there is no consideration that an employee may 'suffer in silence', not because they are loyal and "things will soon get better" (Hirschman, 1970:38), but rather because exit is restricted and, simultaneously, voice is deemed ineffective. Indeed, it may be that voice poses a risk to employees (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Kassing,

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<sup>21</sup> See Edwards (1979) for a critique of Bean (1975)

2002). Despite this central limitation, Exit-Voice responses are often used to cluster conflict expressions (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Gall & Hebdon, 2008).

The purpose of this section was to develop the second rationale underpinning this study. Owing to the narrow focus of IR research, our understanding of the nature of IR conflict is limited (Margerison, 1969; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Despite extensive speculation regarding the characteristics of IR conflict, and whether IR conflict has been individualised, Godard (2011:288) concludes that a "lack of systematic research and limitations to dominant research methodologies make it difficult to draw definite conclusions". Further, little is known about "why, and under what circumstances, a complementary or trade-off relationship prevails among different forms of workplace conflict" (Hebdon & Noh, 2013:35). Similarly, our limited understanding of how IR conflict develops in the workplace represents a major gap in the discourse. This has recently been highlighted by Hebdon and Noh (2013) who offer a useful addition to scant theory in this area. However, this quantitative study focuses on grievances, turnover, and collective job actions. Qualitative research of less visible expressions may offer insight. Weingart *et al.* (2014:2) argue that "little attention has been paid to *how* conflicts are expressed" [emphasis added]. These authors conclude that by researching expressions of conflict, it is possible to improve our understanding of the conflict process, and its impact on organisations. Therefore, the following section considers a variety of non-strike expressions of IR conflict.

## **2.5 EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

This section considers the varied non-strike expressions of workplace IR conflict. While Hirschman's (1970) work on the dynamics of conflict are ill-suited to the specificities of the employment relationship, Exit-Voice responses are often used to cluster expressions of IR conflict. In line with Farrell (1983) and others (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Allen & Tüselmann, 2009), neglect is also considered.

### **EXIT**

Exit refers to quitting (Hirschman, 1970). Freeman and Medoff (1984) argue that turnover is lower in unionised contexts due to the ability of unions to establish bargaining power; secure higher wages; and provide greater opportunity for voice. Consistent with this view, Batt *et al.* (2002) found that, even after controlling for HRM practices on alternative voice, quit rates were lower with union representation. While IR theorists are typically concerned with mass resignation, or the role of the union in reducing exit, the OB literature focuses on turnover as a more individual construct. Bartunek *et al.* (2008) adopt an intermediate stance. They demonstrate that seemingly individual turnover can have collective elements where group sense-making transforms individual

experiences of discontent into 'shared understanding'. This, coupled with a cohesive group identity and a failure to resolve issues, can result in temporally close resignations (ibid). Thus, beyond loyalty, a number of factors influence quit behaviour. Consistent with Emerson's (1962) power-dependency theory, exit behaviour may be curtailed when the availability of alternative employment is limited, or where sunk costs (e.g. loyalty/attachment, firm-specific skills/training) are high. However, quitting is only one way in which an employee can withdraw from the workplace. Bemmels *et al.* (1991:16) state that "... if alternative employment is scarce, employees may rely on less severe variations of this option by reducing their effort, increasing absenteeism or engaging in other disruptive behaviours". Therefore the exit response has been extended to include tardiness as poor time-keeping (Hebdon, 2005) absenteeism, and withdrawal to express IR conflict (Gall, 2013).

Absenteeism, while acknowledged as an expression of IR conflict (Barbash, 1980; Edwards & Scullion, 1982; Edwards, 1986; Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Belanger & Edwards, 2013), is less visible than strike action where motives are generally clear. Bean (1975:98) states that whilst sickness absence is the primary contributor, absenteeism "can also be regarded [as] a form of negative reaction to the employer". There are two types of absenteeism in the workplace, type 1 (T1) which is involuntary due to illness and type 2 (T2) which is voluntary (Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2010).

De Boer *et al.* (2002) state that unfairness can contribute to absenteeism in two ways. Unfairness<sup>22</sup> can lead to absenteeism through workplace stress (De Boer *et al.*, 2002) where employees exhibit physical symptoms. In line with this view, Muir (1994) finds that a high level of stress-related absences, while and Tietrick and Fried (1993) connect stress to conflict in the employment relationship. Second, the 'withdrawal' explanation of absenteeism indicates that employees pursue voluntary absenteeism to avoid the workplace and the "aversive working conditions" (De Boer *et al.*, 2002:181). This is supported by Mulholland (2004) who demonstrates that patterns of absenteeism are rooted in the IR sphere where 'harsh managerial decisions' exacerbate voluntary absence.

Luchak and Gellatly (1996) explain that absenteeism can also be considered as voice due to its ability to communicate information to the employer. However, they acknowledge that it is "indirect and hard to discern given the many things absence can mean" (p.94). Edwards and Scullion (1982) also identify absenteeism as a "purposeful form of resistance" where the action is not just one of self-preservation but rather an a ploy used to undermine management, and its

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<sup>22</sup> See Buttigieg *et al.* (2008) on the link between unfairness in the employment relationship and willingness to engage in industrial action.

agenda (cited in Taylor *et al.*, 2010:271). Owing to this complexity and the different motivations for absenteeism, Behrens (2007:177) concludes "... redirected and informal conflicts are very easy for social scientists to miss". Thus, distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary absence is challenging and as such absenteeism has low visibility (Gall & Hebdon, 2008).

Despite this difficulty, Gall and Hebdon (2008) infer from absenteeism statistics that there is evidence of conflict at work. However, Saundry and Dix (2014) find no significant increase in absenteeism. This may be related to recessionary pressures and increasing managerial control where employees are fearful of recriminations. Taylor *et al.* (2010) conclude that the use of sickness absence policies has shifted the balance of power toward management. These authors call for a multiple stakeholder perspective on absenteeism inclusive of management, unions, and employee perspectives where "[a]ccounting for workers' experiences... [as] perhaps the single most important dimension of future research" (p.285).

While typically considered an individual act (Hebdon & Gall, 2008), Junor *et al.* (2009) consider absenteeism as a form of collective resistance. Similarly, Mullholland (2004), in Ireland, notes that voluntary absenteeism has collective elements when absenteeism becomes an *acceptable* response to workplace stress. This view resonates with the idea of an absence culture (Iverson *et al.*, 2003) and, more broadly, an avoidance culture (Gelfand, *et al.*, 2012). Thus, considering absenteeism as a wholly individual phenomenon fails to recognise the influence of social context.

Employees can pursue cognitive and affective withdrawal where they withdraw effort and cooperation to express IR conflict (Kornhauser *et al.* (eds), 1954). While reminiscent of shirking (Freeman and Medoff, 1984) or neglect (Farrell, 1983; Allen & Tüselmann, 2009), withdrawal of effort is considered here as comparably passive. Barbash (1979) explains that the negotiation of the effort bargain is continuous at the workplace level where an employee who 'slackens' their effort is reminded of their obligations by the line manager. Withdrawal of cooperation can also be considered as an expression of IR conflict where employees exhibit a reduction in goodwill (Turkington, 1975) or flexibility. While withdrawal of cooperation might be construed as resistance (Harrison, 2001), it is likely more passive.

## VOICE

Contemporary conceptualisations of voice are broad (see Budd, 2014). Bagchi (2011:881) considers voice as "opportunities for employees to convey their ideas and opinions" to their employer. Similarly, Bishop and Levine (1999:213) include "employee's ability to express their views and to participate in decision-making". However, Hirschman's seminal work focused on decline. Thus voice is rooted in discontent (Gorden, 1988; Edwards *et al.*, 1995:284). As such, the

concept of dissent may offer value. Kassing (1998:183) defines dissent as "(a) feeling apart from one's organisation... and (b) expressing disagreement or contradictory opinions about one's organisation". Departing from Hirschman (1970), Kassing and others (Taylor *et al.*, 2010; Edwards *et al.*, 1995) recognise that upward dissent or voicing discontent has associated risk. Consequently, employees pursue different strategies including a direct factual appeal; repetition; circumvention; threatening resignation; and presenting solutions (Kassing, 2002, 2009). This latter strategy, more closely aligned with soft voice (Bagchi, 2011), is considered indicative of conflict where the identification of a solution necessarily indicates a problem. However, related to deaf ear syndrome (Harlos, 2001), Burris (2012:868) explains that "far fewer studies consider how managers actually respond to voice".

The use of grievance-filing can be used to operationalise voice (Boroff & Lewin, 1997). Cappelli and Chauvin (1991:3) note that "[t]he rate at which grievances are filed by employees is an important measure of the state of employee relations because it is indicative of the underlying level of conflict between workers and management". However, Lewin (2008:462) concludes that "[a] major limitation of employment conflict resolution research is that some, perhaps most, employment relationship conflict is not made manifest through the filling of formal written grievances". Harlos (2001) explains that while voice mechanisms are typically formal and official, there are a range of informal options. Gordon (1988) presents a wide variety of voice forms from whistle-blowing to silence. Another distinction is whether voice is direct or representative. Extending Hirschman, Luchak (2003) found employees with an affective attachment to the firm were more likely to use direct voice, while those exhibiting a rational attachment pursued representative voice. The type of representation is also a consideration. Stemming from Freeman and Medoff's (1984) use of unionism as a proxy for voice, the two concepts are sometimes considered synonymous. Benson (2000:453) notes; "[f]or some commentators independent unions are the only source of genuine voice". However, in the context of declining union density, non-union voice is also relevant (Hebdon & Noh, 2013; Budd, 2014).

Budd (2014) identifies employee silence as a future direction of voice, arguing that the two areas are ripe for integration. Loyal employees, hoping the situation will improve, may choose silence over voice (Hirschman, 1970:38). Boroff and Lewin (1997:50) found that "... loyal employees who experienced unfair workplace treatment primarily responded by suffering in silence". However, Mullholland (2004) provides evidence suggesting that aggrieved employees can also pursue silence to demonstrate complicit support or solidarity for colleagues. Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) explain that silence is not just the absence of voice but rather intentional concealment of information pertinent to the organisation. The organisational literature identifies two main forms:

acquiescent silence, and defensive silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Expanding this view, Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) explain that the employee can pursue (i) acquiescent silence derived from resignation in which the worker "perceives his working context as unchangeable" (Gambarotto & Camozzo, 2010:168); (ii) defensive silence derived from self-protection, and (iii) pro-social silence derived from a desire to cooperate. Thus, the forms of silence and the motives underpinning it are likely varied. Lewin (2008:462) explains that "a challenge to researchers is to document and assess the extent to which silence in the face of employment relationship conflict is, on the one hand, an effective coping mechanism, and on the other hand a costly suppression mechanism that generates unanticipated deviant behaviour".

Some authors (Gorden, 1988; Budd, 2014) argue that voice can be channelled horizontally within and beyond the boundary of the firm. Gorden (1988) identifies gossip, murmurings, and complaining to co-workers as forms of voice. Budd (2014:485) states:

"... employee interactions such as voicing concerns with each other, sharing common experiences, griping, supporting each other, and sharing tips and techniques. Indeed while overlooked in research, this form of voice has likely been occurring for centuries... where workers gather to socialize and talk shop"

Adopting a similar stance, Waddington and Fletcher (2005) argue that workplace gossip may conceal issues of conflict. This is reminiscent of Tucker (1993) who found evidence that gossip, used as a coping mechanism, often remained in-group. More recently, Bartunek *et al.* (2008) demonstrate that shared understanding in the workplace may culminate in collective turnover. This work shares similarities with venting beyond the boundary of the firm. Richards (2008) reports that blogs represent a new avenue for employees to express workplace conflict, cope, and pursue resistance by 'venting'. Similarly, Saundry *et al.* (2007) find evidence suggesting that web fora are preferred to union recourse and facilitated the creation of a shared identity. Thus, voice has several potential areas of expansion, particularly when insights from other disciplines are considered (Budd, 2014).

## NEGLECT

Farrell (1983) extends Hirschman's (1970) framework to include neglect. Neglect is considered here as passive and covert where the aggrieved employee allows the work situation to deteriorate further through reduced interest, care or attention; errors; and misuse of company time (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). Similarly, Allen and Tüselmann (2009:547) define neglect where an employee "wilfully fails to perform their duties either properly or with a sufficient level of care". Freeman and Medoff (1984) discuss related concepts of 'quiet sabotage or shirking'. However, sabotage, more active than neglect, can also be considered an expression of IR conflict (Eldridge,

1973; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Analoui (1995) explains that sabotage, as a multi-stranded and complex phenomenon that resists definition, is indicative of underlying industrial conflict. Eldridge (1973) reflects on Taylor and Walton (1971) who identify three forms of sabotage as IR conflict: (i) frustration based; (ii) utilitarian; and (iii) to exert control. These forms relate to unplanned damage; stealing to increase value from the employment relationship; and attempting to rebalance the power dynamics in the employment relationship. Robinson and Bennett (1995) provide a typology of 'deviant' workplace behaviours where neglect largely relates to the category of production deviance and sabotage to the category of property deviance. However, these terms are managerial in their orientation and have implicit value judgements. In this regard, the pluralist IR perspective can be of value.

While the Exit-Voice framework, and its later extensions (Farrell, 1983), group a number of IR conflict expressions, some are notably absent. Specifically, Edwards *et al.* (1995) explain that these categories cannot capture resistance which contains both exit and voice components. Therefore, the ensuing section considers resistance as an expression of IR conflict.

#### WORKPLACE RESISTANCE

Edwards *et al.* (1995:283) argue that research of "more covert forms of conflict which may be labelled worker resistance" is central to understanding the experience of IR systems. Resistance is considered in terms of power asymmetries and opposition through a variety of employee behaviours used to contest the management prerogative (Rosigno & Hodson, 2004; Mulholland, 2004; Hebdon & Gall, 2008; Gall, 2013). In this regard there is a clear link between workplace resistance and IR conflict.

Similar to conflict, literature on resistance crosses a number of paradigms. Consequently, different meanings emerge. The concept, as described above, has historical French connotations and is often rooted in the sociological paradigm (Rosgino & Hodson, 2004; Tucker, 1993). Workplace resistance is not discussed with any particular target but rather the implicit resistance of management as an entity, or capitalism as an ideology. However, the extensive managerial literature on resistance to change is not incorporated. Nevertheless, the concept of resistance to change is evident in early writings on IR conflict. Fox (1966:12 cited in Eldridge, 1973) writes:

"Like conflict, restrictive practices and resistance to change have to be interpreted by the unitary frame of reference as being due to stupidity, wrong-headedness or out of date class rancour. Only a pluralistic view can see them for what they are: rational responses by sectional interests to protect employment, stabilize earnings, maintain job status, defend group bargaining power or preserve craft boundaries."



Resistance to change has been a longstanding area of interest for organisational scholars (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Conway & Monks, 2008). Specifically those charged with managing organisations, formulating, and implementing change, have considered employee resistance to change as a barrier to overcome (Ford *et al.*, 2008). Consequently, these writings often view resistance as negative, and irrational (Piderit, 2000). The pluralist perspective is seldom considered. However, Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that employees do not resist change but rather *loss*. Consistent with Fox (1966 cited in Eldridge, 1973), these authors recognise the potential legitimacy of employee concerns. Further, Dent and Goldberg (1999), and later (Ford *et al.*, 2008), argue that change agents themselves can contribute to resistance through poor trust relations. However, Edwards *et al.* (1995) explain that "[t]he meanings and motives of resistance are invariably multiple". Thus, resistance, considered here as a refusal to accept or comply, may include a policy, a management strategy, directions/orders of work, change in any of these, or change as a broader focus of resistance.

In reviewing literatures on non-strike expressions of IR conflict, the variety of expressions is notable. Thus the focus of IR research on strike activity is particularly limiting. A further observation is the difficulty in categorising expressions of IR conflict. Therefore an inductively derived framework may offer value in capturing the array of expressions and the specificities of workplace IR conflict.

## **2.6 THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT ON THE WORKPLACE**

The view that strikes are the most costly expression of IR conflict has underpinned the focus of IR research on the strike expression (Barbash, 1980; Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Vandale (2011:38) writes that "[i]t is self-evident that employers and the organisations dislike strike action, in essence, because of the production losses they entail". Thus, while conflict in the workplace, IR or otherwise, impacts on the organisation in many ways including managerial and employee time (Singleton *et al.*, 2011), damage to relations (Akkerman & Torenlved, 2010), and the use of resources (Jeffery *et al.*, 2003), literature tends to focus on the impact of strikes on organisational performance (Briskin, 2007; Akkerman & Tornvlied, 2010). However, Drinkwater and Ingram (2005:374) argue that, in light of declining strike activity, other expressions of IR conflict are "potentially of no less interest to economic analysis". Thus, the impact of IR conflict warrants further attention in the contemporary context.

Moreover, Eldridge (1973:161) explains that Kerr (1954) holds a preference for overtly, organised IR conflict, the pinnacle of which is the strike. The basis for this view is as follows:

"[I]ndividualistic or group conflict of a covert nature such as sabotage, restriction of output, or absenteeism... are less manageable... [E]ssentially conflict which is open and institutionalized is seen as a safety valve".

In this regard, non-strike expressions may represent a greater threat to the workplace due to the challenges they pose to conflict management. Thus, in line with the research objective, this study will consider the impact of workplace IR conflict in broader terms.

Pondy (1967), writing on organisational conflict, presents a useful framework positing that the impact of organisational conflict can be evaluated through the lenses of productivity, adaptability and stability<sup>23</sup>. He stated that these lenses are not necessarily consistent, and rather represent a guide for examining the aftermath of conflict in an organisational setting. Further, it should be recognised – in line with MST – that these lenses are largely managerial. Thus in using these lenses to examine the impact of IR conflict this author is not focused on its impact on the individual employee or society, but rather the impact on the workplace<sup>24</sup>. Despite these caveats, this framework provides a broad and flexible way to classify the impact of workplace IR conflict. Pondy (1967) concludes that organisational conflict can be simultaneously functional and dysfunctional. In this regard, while the positive impact of IR conflict may be rare and subject to many conditions (see De Dreu, 2008), this view of conflict is consistent with the pluralist paradigm. Barbash (179:656) writes: "[o]nly rarely are there heroes and villains in industrial relations".

## PRODUCTIVITY

Pondy (1967) argues that productivity is valued and therefore more is better. Previous research tends to focus on the impact of IR conflict on organisational productivity and profits. Typically, from an IR perspective the impact of IR conflict on productivity is synonymous with the strike and working days lost. However, as noted, other expressions such as absenteeism or turnover (Batt *et al.*, 2002) may have a similarly adverse impact. Dabscheck (1991:193) found that the losses from industrial disputes [strikes] were "less if not substantially lower than losses associated with labour turnover, absenteeism, industrial deaths and accidents, occupational health and safety, poor health and alcohol and drug dependence". Similarly, Brown and Sessions (1999) state that days lost from absenteeism in the UK during the 1970s equalled or exceeded days lost from

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<sup>23</sup> Though offered by Pondy (1967) to assess the impact of organisational conflict on the organisation, these lenses offer value to the analysis of the impact of workplace IR conflict on the workplace due to the conceptualisation of IR conflict as a subset of organisational conflict. Further, these lenses are defined broadly by Pondy (1967, 1992) and as such lend themselves to adaptation for the purposes of this research.

<sup>24</sup> As stated, this study includes two sides of IR conflict: *employee* expression of IR conflict, and *workplace* impact.

unemployment. Clarke *et al.* (2008) concur, arguing that working days lost from absenteeism greatly exceed those lost from strikes even during peak strike activity. More recently, Vandale (2011:38) concludes that "[s]trikes are... fairly negligible compared to other reasons why workers legally do not work". However, attributing this loss directly to IR conflict is challenging due to the many things absence, or other IR conflict expressions, can mean (Luchak & Gellatly, 1996:94).

Ichniowski (1986) considered the effects of grievance activity on productivity. While a small percentage difference was attributed to grievance-filing, it was argued that these changes in productivity may have further implications in terms of profit. Hebdon (1992:1) concurs, noting that there is "mounting evidence indicating a negative relationship between grievances and productivity". This view is echoed by Boroff and Lewin (1997) who link grievance-filing to other organisational outcomes, or expressions of IR conflict, such as absenteeism and turnover (Boroff & Lewin, 1997). These indicators of an industrial relations climate are in turn correlated with productivity (Ichniowski, 1986 citing Pencavel, 1974; Deery *et al.*, 1999). Similarly, Cutcher-Gershefeld (1991) found that workplaces characterised by adversarial IR were associated with higher costs, higher waste, lower productivity and a lower return per labour hour than plants with cooperative relations.

In the context of declining strike activity, the impact of non-strike expressions on workplace productivity is considered by some as being more significant than strikes (Clarke *et al.*, 2008; Vandale, 2011). However this view predates a decline in strikes:

"The mere listing of these varied types of labor-management conflict behaviour calls attention to the serious limitation inherent in looking at industrial conflict as if it were confined to strikes and formal disputes. Moreover it is apparent that the different expressions of conflict are important not only as they throw light on open warfare in the industry; they are vastly significant in themselves – possibly more important in their effects than overt union-management conflict itself. *Even* in terms of lost production, the interferences and costs of restrictive practices, absenteeism, and turnover far exceed total losses from stoppages due to strikes. In directly human terms, too, the persistent interpersonal and intergroup tensions undoubtedly produce greater ill effects in the form of anxieties and 'nervous symptoms' than do the occasional work interruptions" (Kornhauser *et al.*, 1954:15) [emphasis added].

Thus, almost two decades before strikes began to exhibit decline, these authors recognised that non-strike expressions are likely to have a significant impact on productivity, and other aspects of workplace functioning. This has not been well addressed in previous IR conflict research.

## ADAPTABILITY

Pondy (1967) explains that adaptability is central for organisations to "learn... improve performance and... adapt to changing internal and environmental pressures". Despite IR literature on worker resistance (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Mulholland, 2004), there is little research available on how IR conflict impacts on the ability of a workplace to change. Workplace change, set to alter the dynamic of the employment relationship, may well threaten employee interests. Therefore, workplace change, as a managerial objective (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987), can be considered an input workplace IR conflict (Cowman & Keating, 2013). Fox (1966) explicitly notes resistance to change in the context of IR conflict. Thus, it follows that resistance to change may impact on workplace adaptability.

Drawing on the influence of historical relations, IR conflict may impact on future managerial objectives. Bartram and Cregan (2003:540) state that consultation in IR requires that management "sacrifice... some of their prerogative" while Abbott (2007:63) explains that "securing industrial peace becomes a more important goal than achieving business objectives". Fells (2000:583), studying the process of yielding in labour management negotiation, notes that "[g]iving ground is done quietly and without much fuss, concessions are muted or foreshadowed rather than made explicitly". In this regard, the impact of IR conflict on the change agenda may be a subtle process where both parties conceal the process.

Offering a more positive outlook, Burris (2012) suggests further research on the content and utility of soft voice. Therefore, soft voice (Bachchi, 2011) or 'improvement-orientated voice' (Lam, 2012) may also promote change and solutions to workplace problems. However, McClean *et al.* (2013) highlight the managerial response to employee suggested change where low change ability and willingness is *positively* correlated with exit.

While previous research focuses on the impact of IR conflict on productivity, workplace change is a central consideration in managerial literatures. Thus, Pondy's lens of adaptability may offer value by broadening our perspective of IR conflict and its impact.

## STABILITY

Pondy (1967:308) identifies stability as valuable where an organisation "improves if it can increase its cohesiveness and solvency" through the stability of relationships. He (1992:257) provides further clarification, referring to the "smooth flow of a stable and cooperative set of relationships that made up an organization". This lens is extended here to include the continuation of the

organisation; pursuit of its mission; and the extent to which parties in the (employment) relationship behave in a predictable manner.

Evidence suggests that *cooperative* union-management relations contributed to higher productivity and quality of customer service (Deery & Iverson, 2005; Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991). However, Gall and Hebdon (2008) and others (Lewin, 2001, 2005; Godard, 2011, 2014) explain the duality of the employment relationship. Fundamentally, *conflict* in the employment relationship is not conducive to *cooperative* relations. Specifically, the withdrawal of cooperation (Barbash, 1979) is likely to undermine the stability of relations. Wall and Callister (1995) describe relationship effects of conflict in terms of: (i) changes of perceptions between the parties and the erosion of trust, (ii) a reduction in the quantity and quality of communication, and (iii) changes in behaviour and management style. Jehn (1997) explains that in the context of eroded trust, parties focus on reducing threats, increasing power, and building group cohesion. This lowers goodwill and hinders organisational performance.

Returning to Abbott (2007), IR conflict may also undermine management's ability to manage. Jones and Saundry (2012) in the UK who note the reluctance of line managers to engage in discipline due to a fear of litigation. This is echoed by Teague and Roche (2012) who found that line managers often lack confidence to manage workplace conflict. Interestingly, these authors find that 'supervisory engagement' in conflict management is positively correlated with productivity and change capacity. Thus, the impact of IR conflict on the stability of relationships may influence other areas of workplace functioning: productivity and adaptability.

Beyond impact on relationships, non-strike expressions of IR conflict are likely to undermine workplace stability. Absenteeism, where motives are concealed (Bean, 1975; Luchak & Gellatly, 1996; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2010), is unpredictable. De Boer *et al.* (2002:181) note that "[a]bsenteeism is undesirable for employees, their colleagues and employers (i.e., stagnation of work, high costs)". Quitting may lead to similar outcomes. Analoui (1995:49) states that "unconventional practices in general and sabotage in particular could be a real threat to the survival of any workplace organization". Therefore, drawing together insights from related literatures, it is suggested that IR conflict may impact on workplace stability.

In sum, while the impact of IR conflict is often measured in terms of the strike and working days lost, many authors (Kornhauser *et al.*, 1954; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Vandale, 2011) suggest that the impact of non-strike expressions is also significant. Further, beyond measures of productivity, this research argues that IR conflict impacts on the core functioning of the workplace - its ability to adapt, survive, and pursue mission. Ultimately the focus of IR research on the strike

has limited our knowledge on the nature of workplace IR conflict and how it is expressed in the workplace. This in turn restricts our understanding of how IR conflict impacts on the workplace. These issues on their own merit, and with reference to the field of conflict management, represent serious gaps in our knowledge.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

At the outset this chapter identified three objectives: to develop the study rationale; identify; explore the areas for contribution; and provide an overview of literature informing this study and the discussion presented in Chapter 8. In addition, the chapter sought to provide a working definition of workplace IR conflict, and present a conceptual framework.

The chapter discussed two rationales underpinning this study. The preoccupation of research on the strike expression of IR conflict is well documented (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014). However, strike activity has exhibited sustained, and internationally replicated decline (Bordogna, 2010; Godard, 2011, 2014; Roche, 2014). Therefore, the focus on the strike is not reflective of the contemporary context. However, further limitations arise from this narrow focus. There has been a longstanding view that IR conflict is expressed in a variety of ways. However, this not well captured in previous IR conflict research. Consequently, little is known about the nature of workplace IR conflict: its expressions, characteristics, dynamics, and development in the workplace. Further, the impact of IR conflict on the workplace is also considered too narrowly. Therefore, this study will consider the impact of workplace IR conflict, and its non-strike expressions, in terms of workplace productivity, adaptability, and stability (Pondy, 1967).

Drawing on these conclusions, the research objective and research questions are now re-stated. The research objective of this study is to explore, more broadly, the nature of workplace IR conflict. Two research questions underpin this objective:

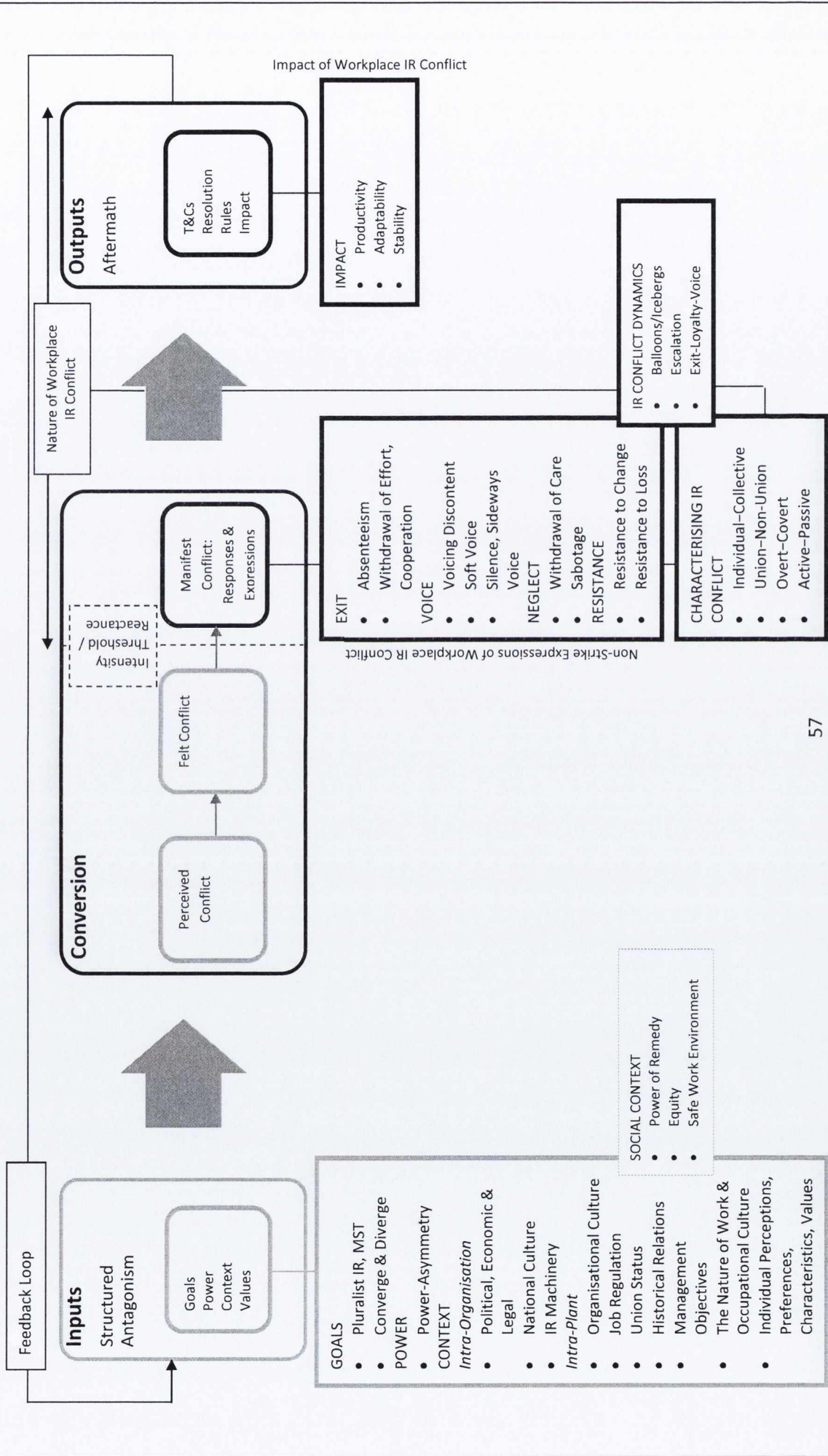
- I. How do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict?
- II. How does workplace industrial relations conflict impact on the workplace?

At this juncture it is useful to draw together the insights from previous literature to create a conceptual framework. However, it should be noted that this study is inductive *and* deductive. Further, the purpose of the study is theory-building *not* theory testing. Thus, rather than presenting a theoretically derived model and testing it with empirical facts, this study seeks to build theory where context-specific insights emerge from the data. In this regard the author is reminded of Whitfield and Strauss (2008:172) who explain that – albeit 'under siege' – IR research has a longstanding tradition of highly inductive context-specific research where theories are

developed from "the facts, not as logical deductions from other theories". In this regard the conceptual framework in figure 2.7, seeks to present, not a theory, but a map of ideas.

Figure 2.7: Conceptual Framework

- IR is concerned with the employment relationship as the panoply of relations between employer and employee(s), or representatives thereof. This relationship, predicated on exchange, and an economic and psychological employment contract, is highly interdependent and power asymmetric.
- Workplace IR Conflict is the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment.





The framework identifies (i) the key assumptions of the researcher; (ii) the key 'things' to be studied; and (iii) how these relate to each other, and the broader workplace IR conflict process. The research problem, as discussed, is to explore more broadly the nature of workplace IR conflict. To this end two questions are posed on the expression and impact of workplace IR conflict. These areas of focus are highlighted in Figure 2.7 where the non-strike expressions of IR conflict, and the impact of IR conflict are identified. These fall under the banner of the nature of workplace IR conflict which is also connected to the dynamics and characteristics of IR conflict.

Figure 2.7 sets out the author's key assumptions. In doing so the author defines IR, and Workplace IR Conflict for the purposes of this study:

IR is concerned with the employment relationship as the panoply of relations between employer and employee(s), or representatives thereof. This relationship, predicated on exchange, and an economic and psychological employment contract, is highly interdependent and power asymmetric.

Workplace IR Conflict is the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment.

These definitions are based on the following assumptions:

- The study adopts the OIR paradigm which, broader than the Modern view of IR, is concerned with the study of the employment relationship (Kauffman, 2008) involving exchange relations, and economic and psychological contracts of employment (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994). As such IR, as it is conceptualised here, is concerned with the panoply of relations that exist between employers and employees, or representatives thereof (Ackers, 1994).
- Distinguishing the IR perspective from broader perspectives, IR - and the pluralist standpoint adopted - is particularly concerned with the power asymmetry and interdependence that characterise the employment relationship (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994; Benderski, 2003).
- The employment relationship is an authority relationship where employees agree to defer to the managerial prerogative (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994; Edwards *et al.*, 1995). Arising from this, and employer control of resources, the employment relationship is subject to a significant power asymmetry (Lewin, 2001).
- Consistent with the pluralist paradigm and multiple stakeholder theory, this author assumes that interests, or goals in the employment relationship are multiple and motives are mixed (Kochan, 1998). In this regard, the exchange contains cooperative and antagonistic elements (Sisson, 2008). Thus, employer-employee relations are interdependent (Edwards *et al.*, 1995).

- This study, in line with Edwards (1986, 2003) and Edwards *et al.* (1995), is concerned with conflict between employer and employee. It is argued that the power asymmetry and interdependence that characterise the employment relationship are fundamental to the nature, expression, and impact of Workplace IR Conflict (Sexton, 1996). These characteristics do not apply to the same degree to horizontal relations at work.
- The study adopts a process-based conceptualisation of Workplace IR Conflict. As such, the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.7 integrates Craig's (1967) Input-Output Model with Pondy's (1967) model. In this regard, Pondy (1967) is used to explicate the conversion process.
- Inputs are considered in terms of the structured antagonism (Edwards, 1986). Goals, power, context, and values are also identified as key inputs in the process of workplace IR conflict. The literature suggests that these factors, outlined below, shape the nature, expression and impact of workplace IR conflict.
  - Goals are multiple and mixed.
  - Power relations, and specifically the degree of power asymmetry, are a key component of workplace IR conflict.
  - Context at the inter-organisation and intra-plant levels (Margerison, 1969) influence the nature of IR conflict where each level corresponds to a number of factors that act as inputs. The social context and management's power of remedy is also identified. While the study is concerned with employer-employee conflict, Gall and Hebdon's (2008) concept of 'power of remedy' is included where horizontal relations impinge on the employment relationship (Edwards, 1986).
  - Values are included, alongside preferences and characteristics at the level of the individual parties' in the intra-plant context.
- Workplace IR conflict is considered as action centred. This is reflected in the working definition of the construct and in Figure 2.7 highlights the manifest conflict. In this regard conflict does not occur until actors pursue conflict behaviour. However, as the study is inclusive of cognitive states, conflict exists if perception results in conflict behaviour. In line with Pondy (1967) behaviour is considered conflictful if it is identified as such by participants themselves<sup>25</sup>.
- A framework of responses and expressions is provided in Figure 2.7 under manifest conflict. Responses in line with Hirschman (1970) and Rusbult *et al.* (1988) include exit, voice, and neglect. In addition - drawing on Edwards *et al.* (1995) - resistance is included. These

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<sup>25</sup> This is consistent with the subjectivist orientation of this study, and phenomenology underpinning the interpretivist paradigm.

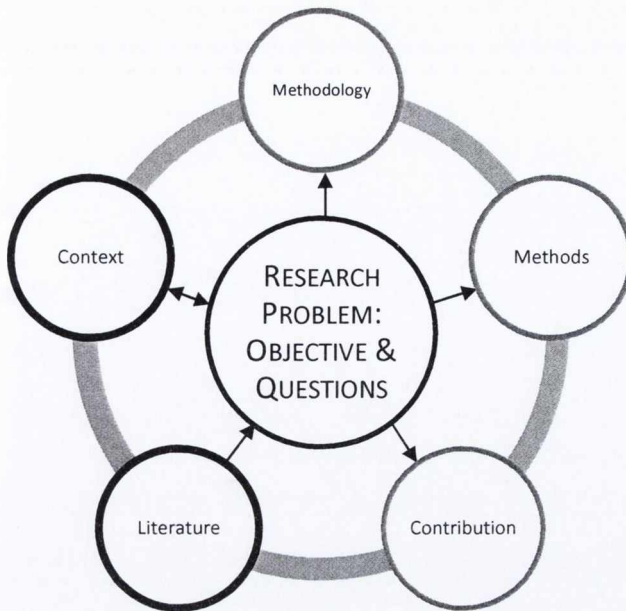
responses are used to cluster the array of expressions identified in previous literature. A more detailed taxonomy of IR conflict expressions is provided in Appendix 4 in the form of a coding manual used for the deductive phase of integrated data analysis. However, cognisant of the limitations of Exit-Voice, and ELVN adaptations, this framework of responses can be considered a 'placeholder' allowing for the creation of a deductively derived alternative (Maxwell, 2013). Thus, the study remains open to new insights that may emerge from the data.

- The outputs of workplace IR conflict are identified as aftermath including terms and conditions, resolution of IR conflict, and impact. Forming the basis of the second research question, impact is highlighted in Figure 2.7. In line with Pondy (1967), impact is considered in terms of workplace productivity, adaptability, and stability.
- Finally, Figure 2.7 includes a feedback loop. This indicates the processual conceptualisation of IR conflict, the significance of historical relations, and the role of trust in the employment relationship.

Having developed the study rationale and presented a conceptual framework, the next chapter situates this study within its context: healthcare. This chapter will explicate the choice of this setting and identify areas for secondary contribution. Following this, the research dissertation moves from concerns of problem identification - *what* should be studied and *where* - to concerns of *how* the study should be designed (Singleton & Straits, 1999). Thus, following an overview of the selected healthcare setting in Chapter 3, issues of research design, methodology, and methods are considered in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 3

# WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT IN HEALTHCARE



"The nature of conflict in the industrial society is probably best understood in particular contexts" (Barbash, 1979:646).

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research objective and questions were identified and developed in chapters one and two. To recap, this project seeks to explore the nature, expression and impact of workplace IR conflict. This study is situated in a healthcare setting. The primary purpose of this chapter is to link the literature on the construct of interest, IR conflict, to the research context, healthcare. To this end, the Chapter aims to present the rationale for selecting this 'particular context' (Barbash, 1979). Specifically, Section 3.2 will outline the challenges of managing people in healthcare before Section 3.3 considers the IR features of the sector, and the evidence of IR conflict. In addition, the Chapter aims to identify areas for secondary contribution, and sensitise this study to sectoral characteristics which may influence the nature of workplace IR conflict in this setting.

### 3.2 MANAGING PEOPLE IN HEALTHCARE: A RECIPE FOR CONFLICT?

The management of employees and the employment relationship is central in healthcare organisations due to the existence and interaction of a number of features in the setting. Healthcare is a labour-intensive industry (Buchan, 2000; McDermott & Keating, 2011, 2014) where labour costs dominate operating budgets by 60-80% in the UK (Corby, 1992; Buchan, 2000), and represent the largest proportion of total cost in healthcare organisations in developed countries (Stanton, 2002). This is echoed in the Irish context where salary costs constitute 70% of Irish hospital expenditures (McDermott & Keating, 2014). Conversely, the demand for healthcare has exhibited a sustained and "almost unlimited" increase (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002:1443).

Bolton (2004:329) writes:

“At the heart of two decades of reform is a logic that emphasises contradictory elements: the hospital must cut costs but also deliver a quality service”.

These features now present against a backdrop of economic recession and fiscal crises posing increasing pressure to managers and employees (Harney & Monks, 2014; Russell & McGinnity, 2014). As such, healthcare organisations are becoming increasingly resource-constrained in Ireland (Norman, 2012) and abroad (Weber, 2011), necessitating work intensification and significant reform in pay, pensions and workplace practices (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013). Thus, healthcare organisations face renewed challenges of "saving lives and saving cost" (McDermott & Keating, 2014:192).

The healthcare setting is characterised most notably by its complexity. Denis *et al.* (2001:809) describes healthcare as "... a classic pluralistic domain involving diverging interests... and multiple actors". This multiplicity exists both within and beyond healthcare organisations (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002; Stanton *et al.*, 2004; Hyde *et al.*, 2009; McBride & Mustchin, 2013). In addition to the influence of the economic context outlined above, political preferences have a significant impact on people-management in public healthcare. Authors in the UK argue that a change of political leadership from the Conservatives to the Labour party had a significant impact on the operation of the health sector and the hospitals within it (Truss, 2003; Corby & Hignam, 2007). The influence of politics in shaping reform agenda, pay policy and staffing has been evidenced in the Irish setting through the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act (2010); the public service moratorium on recruitment and promotion; and Public Service Agreements 1 and 2. In this regard, people-management in healthcare is subject to 'upstream decisions' (Buchan, 2000; Kessler *et al.*, 2000; Truss *et al.*, 2002; Stanton *et al.*, 2004).

Within healthcare organisations and specifically hospitals, Truss (2003) explains that the healthcare workforce consists of a multiplicity of groups each with their own particular set of interests. There are two key implications of this feature. First, there is not one employment relationship but rather several. As such the issue of equity becomes a key consideration. This is consistent with Mintzberg (1997:7) who explained the tendency of professional groups and their interests to diverge, where dealing with one group "can be divisive in the system". Second, related to diverging interests tensions are likely between employee groups (Bolton & Way, 2007). It is argued that the existence of these departmental and speciality divisions leads to 'in-group favouritism' and 'out-group discrimination' in hospitals (Michie & West, 2004). Consequently hospitals hold, not one cohesive culture, but numerous well-defined sub-cultures relating to

functional and professional boundaries (Coghlan & McAuliffe, 2003; Mannion *et al.*, 2004). The combination of professional boundaries and discretionary resource-allocation ultimately leads to political or self-interested behaviour where each department defends their functional territory (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002). Davies *et al.* (2001:113) term this "tribal behaviour". In light of this complexity, Stanton *et al.* (2004:323) conclude that the multi-player relationship in healthcare is one of the "critical issues facing human resource management at the health workplace". Thus management, and their "power of remedy" (Gall & Hebdon, 2008:590), may be required to act as peacekeeper not just in the employment relationship(s) but also on the horizontal level between employee cohorts.

Adding to tribal mentality and the complexity of the sector, healthcare organisations are described as professional bureaucracies where expertise and power resides with the operating core - the professionals (Mintzberg 1980). Currie *et al.* (2008: 543) explain that "[p]ower is not derived solely from position or hierarchy, but from professional knowledge". Consequently, there is often a knowledge asymmetry between managers and professionals in healthcare organisations. Barnett *et al.* (2007:19) comment:

"... it may be difficult for the hospital HR function to contribute to organizational change because of the scepticism that surrounds the concept of management – the 'grey suits'".

Professional workers use judgement or discretion, and work in a field which is resistant to standardisation (Cleland, 1975; Armstrong, 2000). Mintzberg (1997:13) states, in reference to healthcare, that "managing professionals is akin to herding cats". Therefore, managing people in healthcare is subject to less favourable power dynamics. However autonomy, as a key feature of professional employment, is becoming more contested in the context of resource constraints (Armstrong, 2000; Bach, 2000). This is likely exacerbated in the context of the 'Great Recession' (Teague & Roche, 2014:176).

A further challenge to people-management in this setting is the diffused loyalty of healthcare professionals. Owing perhaps to their well-defined sub-cultures (Coghlan & McAuliffe, 2003; Mannion *et al.*, 2004), professional groups are loyal to their profession. In such circumstances, the employer or manager is perhaps more marginalised than in typical employments where they (i) lack skill-specific knowledge to direct autonomous professionals, and (ii) compete for employee loyalty. This is illustrated by Buchan (2004:4):

"The avowed first loyalty of those with sector-specific skills and qualifications (physicians, nurses, etc.) tends to be to their profession...rather than to their employer".

Therefore, the knowledge asymmetry (Currie *et al.*, 2008), resultant autonomy (Mintzberg, 1980); and diffused loyalty (Buchan, 2004) that characterise healthcare professionals creates complex relations between management and employees. In healthcare, the balance of power - from time to time at least - may tip in favour of employees. These challenges of managing people in healthcare are illustrated by issues in the sector.

### **Issues in Healthcare Management**

There is much literature in the healthcare management domain devoted to the role of HRM in delivering performance in healthcare (West, 2000, 2001, 2002; Hyde *et al.*, 2009; McBride & Mustchin, 2013; Townsend *et al.*, 2013; Baluch *et al.*, 2013). McDermott and Keating (2014:191) write:

"In theory, imperatives to reduce the costs of service provision and improve the quality of care, combined with the human-capital-intensive, high skilled and high impact nature of health service delivery, make healthcare an ideal context in which HRM can make a contribution".

At the heart of healthcare organisations lies the patient. In this regard the assessment of performance can extend far beyond productivity or profitability (West, 2000). Therefore, in managing people in healthcare, patient outcomes and quality of patient care are central. Hyde *et al.* (2009) conclude that the role of HRM in meeting expectations of employees is significant for hospital performance. In this regard, met expectations resulted in improved patient care and service innovation. However, unmet expectations, in the context of the psychological contract, resulted in work-to-rule type behaviours where employees withdrew effort and cooperation. Similarly, Freeney and Fellenz (2013) provide evidence in the Irish setting that work engagement contributes to quality of care, individual and unit performance.

However, Reason (2004:28) explains that "... in many healthcare activities serious harm is but a few unguarded moments away". Buchanan *et al.* (2013:61) provide evidence relating to the UK:

"... more than 5,000 patients died or were seriously injured as a result of NHS safety incidents in the six months to March 2011. A total of 1,313 people in England and 78 in Wales died as a result of medical errors involving the care they received from hospitals, mental health trusts and ambulance services. A further 3,699 patients in England suffered 'severe harm' – permanent harm, including disability and scarring".

Davies *et al.* (2000:111) explain that the 'considerable toll' of medical errors have highlighted the importance of quality improvement in healthcare. More recently, Buchanan *et al.* (2013:62) explain that "[s]erious incidents and never events harm patients, disrupt services, damage organisational reputations and individual careers and can generate heavy costs". Thus, managing

people in healthcare can impact on healthcare quality (Leonard *et al.*, 2007; Freeney & Fellenz, 2013; Townsend *et al.*, 2013); organisational errors (Gowen *et al.*, 2006; Buchanan *et al.*, 2013); and patient mortality (Aiken *et al.*, 1994; West *et al.*, 2002, 2006; Harris *et al.*, 2007).

Rates of absenteeism amongst healthcare employees has been a long-standing source of concern for managers in healthcare (Pines *et al.*, 1985; Gellatly, 1995; Junor *et al.*, 2009; Chênevert *et al.*, 2013). Chênevert *et al.* (2013:351) link the economic context and work intensification in the sector to an increase in the rates of absenteeism. Similarly, turnover in hospitals is considered "endemic in healthcare systems around the world" particularly amongst nurses, medical practitioners, and higher level hospital management (Ang *et al.*, 2013:3086).

These issues have significant implications for healthcare delivery and healthcare costs (Pines *et al.*, 1985; Gellatly, 1995; Townsend *et al.*, 2013; Baluch *et al.*, 2013; Chênevert, 2013). For instance, in the Irish health service, absenteeism reaches a rate of 4.8% or almost 4,900 working days lost every day (Mitchell, 2012, 2013) while turnover amongst Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors (NCHDs) remains a critical threat to service delivery (Buttimer, 2005; Jordan, 2010; Brand *et al.*, 2012; Chalikonda, 2013). Consequently, there have been efforts amongst researchers and policy-makers alike to pursue effective management of healthcare workers (Ang *et al.*, 2013; HSE Managing Attendance Policy, 2014). Regardless, these issues continue to challenge managers in healthcare organisations.

In addition to performance, there is extensive literature devoted to HRM and change implementation in healthcare (Conway & Monks, 2008). Owing perhaps to its proportion in fiscal spending and its position in frontline services, the healthcare setting is subject to much public scrutiny (Townsend *et al.*, 2013) and reform efforts (McDermott & Keating, 2014). Clarke *et al.* (2001) note in the US that "at the heart of [transforming healthcare services] are rising healthcare costs, declining government spending, increasing pressures on public and private budgets, and accelerating scientific and technological change". More recently, in the Irish context, McDermott and Keating (2014) note that "... reforms are being contemplated worldwide to make healthcare organisations more responsive to user needs as well as more financially accountable". *The Future Health - Strategic Framework for Reform of the [Irish] Health Service* (2012-2015:i) states:

"The need for change in the health service is unquestionable. The current system is unfair to patients; it often fails to meet their needs fast enough; and it does not deliver value for money. The system is facing major challenges including significantly reducing budgets; long waiting lists; capacity deficits; an ageing population; and a significant growth in the incidence of chronic illness. It is simply not possible to address these challenges within the confines of the existing health system. We must implement large-scale change that delivers fundamental reform".



In a labour-intensive sector, change hinges on the management of employees. Conant and Kleiner (1998:114) write "that managing change is a synonym for managing people through change" while Healy and McKee (1997:286) state that "[t]he success or failure of health sector reform... depends, to a large extent, on their health care staff". Despite the potential for HRM to contribute to reform in this context (McDermott & Keating, 2014), there has been difficulty achieving change in healthcare organisations (Buchan, 2000; Barnett *et al.*, 2007). More recently, McDermott and Keating (2012:63) state that "Ireland has experienced sustained problems in attaining service improvement in healthcare". Consequently, Bartram and Dowling (2013:3035) call for further research to uncover the reasons for difficulty in healthcare reform whilst advocating the development of greater cross-disciplinary research:

"... we need further research that unpacks the reasons, consequences and solutions for institutional inertia within the health care sector... we need research that examines ways to reduce barriers to the implementation and operation of HRM in the health care sector".

Thus, the ability to change remains a central concern for managing people in healthcare, and an area for further healthcare research.

Drawing this section to a close, it is concluded that managing people in healthcare is complex. High costs and high stakes combined with a variety of powerful employee and stakeholder voices pose significant challenges. This is evidenced by the ongoing difficulties in the sector relating to service quality and organisational errors (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Reason, 2004), high levels of absenteeism (Pines *et al.*, 1985; Chênevert *et al.*, 2013) and turnover (Brand *et al.*, 2012; Ang *et al.*, 2013), and a sustained difficulty in achieving change (Buchan, 2000; Barnett *et al.*, 2007; McDermott & Keating, 2012, 2014; McDermott *et al.*, 2013). Despite these longstanding challenges healthcare organisations now face, in light of increasing resource constraints (Weber, 2011; Norman, 2012), a re-negotiation of employment relationships and increasing challenges to professional autonomy. These characteristics of the sector signal the potential for IR conflict in healthcare. However, adding further complexity to the setting, there are also a number of IR features in healthcare that are worthy of consideration.

### **3.3 INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT IN HEALTHCARE**

IR in healthcare is varied and challenging. Bray and Strachan (2002:149) state that "[t]he health care sector provides a complex environment in which to examine industrial relations". There are a number of IR features in the sector that pose additional challenges to the management of people in healthcare: high union density and coverage; multi-unionism; precedent-bound decision

making; and powerful, collectivised professionals. These features may account for McDermott and Keating's (2011) conclusion that IR dominates the practice of HR managers in Irish hospitals.

Healthcare organisations are typically characterised by comparatively high union density and coverage (Bartram *et al.*, 2005). In the Irish context, coverage of collective bargaining is estimated at 100 per cent (Farrelly, 2009) and union density at 86 per cent (Dobbins, 2009a) which far exceeds the national average of 44 per cent and 34 per cent respectively (Farrelly, 2012). These trends are replicated internationally (Kraemer, 2011; Prosser, 2011). Therefore, unlike private sector unions, unions in healthcare have largely retained their membership. Kearney (2010:90) writes: "... in contrast to their... private sector counterparts, public... unions present a picture of relative strength". Thus, in this sector there is arguably more potential for traditional, collective, unionised and overt IR conflict in the form of strikes and other classic expressions.

As noted, healthcare organisations are composed of multiple employee groups. However, the sector is also characterised by multi-unionism (Truss, 2003; Bartram *et al.*, 2005). Multi-unionism refers to a situation where, for the purposes of collective bargaining, employees are represented by more than one union (Flood *et al.*, 1996; Akkerman, 2008). Clegg (1979:174) describes this feature of IR as "bizarre and chaotic". In line with this view, many authors consider multi-unionism as a barrier to organisational effectiveness and productivity (see Dobson, 1997) and associated with higher strike activity (Akkerman, 2008). Related to demarcation, it is thought that multi-unionism undermines organisational efficiency by protecting cohort domains (*ibid*). In this regard, the tribal mentality of healthcare (Davies *et al.*, 2001) may be reinforced by Trade Unions which, in some instances, defend occupational boundaries. However, Dobson (1997:547) concludes that "any view that [multi-unionism] necessarily reduces a firm's efficiency is far too simplistic". In contrast, Heaton *et al.* (2002) suggest, in a hospital setting, that inter- and intra-union relations can enable and constrain management decisions and policy implementation. In any event, multi-unionism adds to the already burgeoning array of interests in healthcare and, coupled with higher union density (Bartram *et al.*, 2005), signals a well-organised workforce.

The professional nature of healthcare employees was highlighted in Section 3.2. However, this characteristic combined with high union density signals collectivised professionals as a feature of the setting (Stanton *et al.*, 2004; Buchan, 2004). In addition to Trade Union organisations, the sector is also comprised of professional associations which can constrain the ability of HR in areas from recruitment and selection, to training and performance appraisal (Truss *et al.*, 2002; Truss, 2003; Rigoli & Dussault, 2003; Buchan, 2004; Bolton & Way, 2007). Further, given the centrality of power in the study of IR (Benderski, 2003; Lewin, 2001, 2005), the power of collectivised professionals can be considered an IR feature of the sector. Fitzgerald *et al.* (2002:1440) note that

"[h]istorically and currently, it is clear that the medical profession retains pre-eminence". This dynamic is evidenced in the UK where a legacy of confrontation between management and medical professionals is said to hinder the ability of HR to contribute (Hyde *et al.*, 2006). Arguably, the management of professionals is somewhat of a paradox where managers attempt to *constrain* professional *autonomy*.

Precedent - a tenet of IR (Margerison, 1969) - is identified as significant and far-reaching in this setting. A thematic review of Labour Court cases reveals that precedent in Irish hospitals can reverberate throughout the organisation, the system, and even beyond the employer where decisions in a public-HSE hospital inform conflicts in public-voluntary hospitals<sup>26</sup> (Cowman & Keating, 2013). This feature, combined with the sector's pluralist nature (Denis *et al.*, 2001), creates further complexity in IR and people-management. Specifically, the issue of fairness becomes central where an employment relationship with one group is evaluated not on its own, but relative to other employee groups. Consequently, the ability of managers to adapt practice to different groups (see McDermott & Keating, 2011) may be difficult.

Reflecting on the issues facing people-management in healthcare, this author argues that the IR conflict perspective has relevance. Healthcare has been characterised by persistent reform efforts and significant difficulty in achieving change (Buchan, 2007; Barnett *et al.*, 2008; McDermott & Keating, 2012; 2014; McDermott *et al.*, 2013). Change implementation in healthcare tends to be researched from context (Pettigrew *et al.*, 1992), structure (Denis *et al.*, 2001), and agency (Buchanan & Boddy, 1992; Buchanan *et al.*, 2007) perspectives. The IR perspective, given the highly pluralist and unionised nature of healthcare organisations, is a notable absence. However, there is evidence in HR and organisational literatures from Ireland (Conway & Monks, 2009; McDermott & Keating, 2011); the UK (Buchan, 2000); and the US (Rigoli & Dussault, 2003) suggesting that IR features influence healthcare reform. These broader literatures identify the role of employees (Harris *et al.*, 2007; Truss, 2003) and unions (Martineau & Buchan, 2000) in change implementation.

Rigoli and Dussault (2003:1478) explain that employees are "strategic actors who can act individually or collectively to modify the governments' projects, such as trying to impede budget cuts...". In this regard both unions and employees - powerful professionals that they are - can impact on change implementation. Currie *et al.* (2008:543) note that healthcare professionals, drawing on professional power, can "resist managerial interventions". McDermott *et al.* (2013),

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<sup>26</sup> The Irish healthcare system consists of three hospital types: public-HSE, public-voluntary and private. While public-HSE and public-voluntary hospitals are both government funded, voluntary hospitals retain some autonomy including direct employment relationships with employees.

drawing on findings from the UK and Ireland, suggest that local level change recipients can respond to a nationally-driven policy in a range of ways: avoid, abstain, adopt, adapt, or add to change agendas. In this regard, employees and their representatives – depending on their response – can wield a positive or negative impact on change implementation.

In line with Martineau and Buchan (2000:1) who suggest that a unionised context poses “serious opposition” to the implementation of change, Heaton *et al.* (2000:315) argue that union-management relationships can “both facilitate and constrain decision making and, ultimately, the implementation of policy” in the NHS. Consequently, Buchan (2000:322) asserts that one of the three key functions of the HR department is to manage relationships with unions, explaining that unions can pose a “major limitation on the pace of organizational change”. This is supported by research suggesting that managerial innovations are more successful if unions are involved in the processes of design and implementation (Deery *et al.*, 1999) where culture, and the quality of relationships determines a hospital's ability to innovate (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002). In the Irish healthcare setting, Conway and Monks (2008: 81) note that “... any questioning of change has resulted in labour court/labour commission proceedings”. More recently McDermott and Keating (2011), again in Irish healthcare, found that union resistance constrained management decision-making. Therefore, IR features of the setting may be relevant to healthcare reform.

While these writings are typically from the HR perspective, the influence of employees signals the value of a pluralist IR perspective. The multiplicity of interests and the relationships between the parties - employees, Trade Unions, and employer - are potentially related to change implementation. Returning to Chapter 2, research on resistance to change and loss as expressions of IR conflict may offer insight in this context. Further, against a backdrop of failed change initiatives, the use of Pondy's (1967) criterion of adaptability to assess the impact of IR conflict may be particularly relevant in this setting.

Similarly, issues such as the quality of patient care; providing services; organisational errors; and absenteeism identified as key concerns in this sector may be related to IR conflict. Existing literature identifies absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict (Bean, 1975) while errors may be indicative of neglect (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Allen & Tüselmann, 2009). In this regard, Pondy's (1967) lens of stability may also offer value.

Quite aside from managerial challenges, the healthcare setting is a microcosm of IR features (Bray & Strachan, 2002). High union density and coverage; multi-unionism; collectivised and powerful professionals; and far-reaching precedent combine to create additional challenges for the management of people in healthcare. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the IR

perspective, and specifically the IR conflict perspective may provide insight into key concerns in healthcare organisations from absenteeism and errors, to change delivery. Despite this, IR research on healthcare organisations is limited. Bray and White (2002:193) write:

"Despite considerable numbers employed in hospitals, the importance of these facilities to public health and their prominent place in public policy debates, the existing literature in Australia and New Zealand of industrial relations in hospitals over recent years is remarkably thin. There is some analysis of the politics of health and change in health policy... but very little research exploring how these developments impacted upon employees or industrial relations..."

Therefore, it is argued that the IR perspective on issues in healthcare - such as change implementation and absenteeism - may offer insight. The IR features of the sector and the challenges to management identified in Section 3.2 combine to signal the potential for adversarial relations and IR conflict. This suggests that the healthcare setting is fertile ground for the investigation of IR conflict.

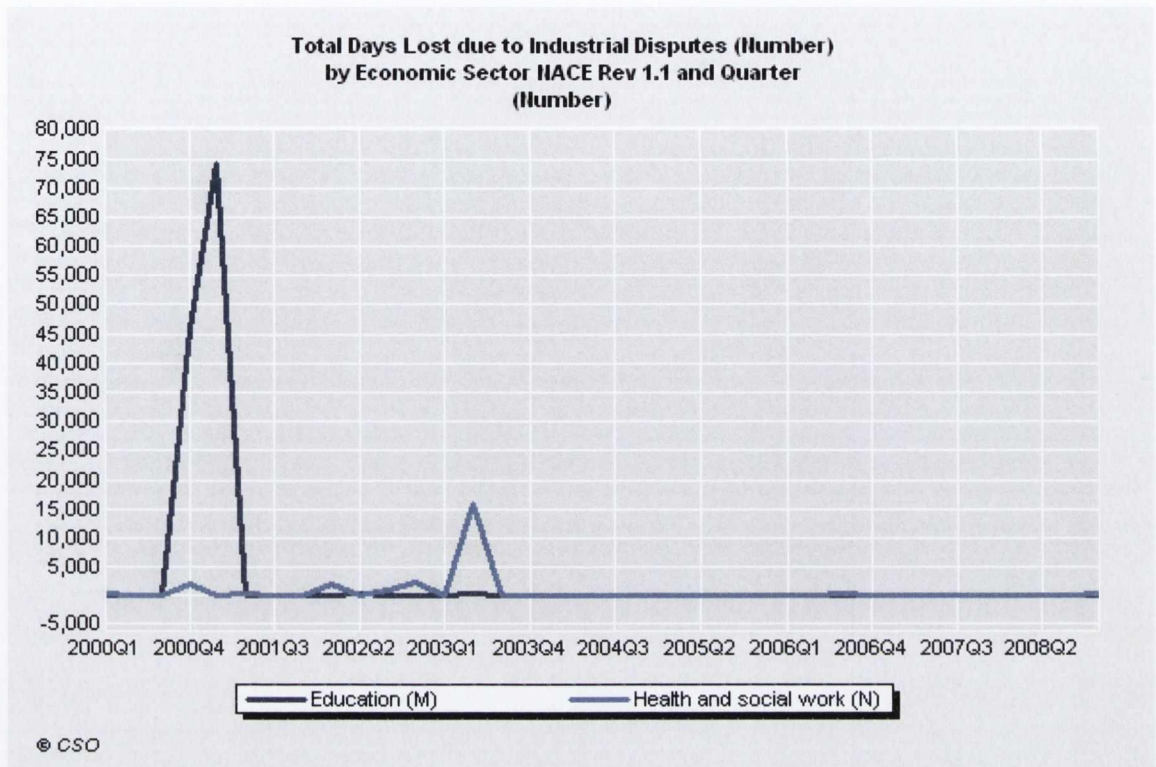
#### **IR Conflict in the Irish Health Service**

Conforming to this expectation, the Irish health service is popularly characterised as conflict-prone (Wall, 2009) and having "highly adversarial, traditional and defensive relations" (Dobbins, 2009b; HSE, 2006; Wall, 2009). Commentators refer to "seemingly intractable disputes involving nurses and consultants" (Dobbins, 2006), "a culture of confrontation" (Kinsella, 2007) and a "sustained campaign of opposition" (Wall, 2009). The Labour Relations Commission, LRC (2001:1) stated that;

"The [Irish] Health Service is one of the largest employments in the State with approximately 80,000 people involved in the provision of health care. It operates in an extremely complex and demanding environment where issues concerning human resource management... and industrial relations can become strained from time to time".

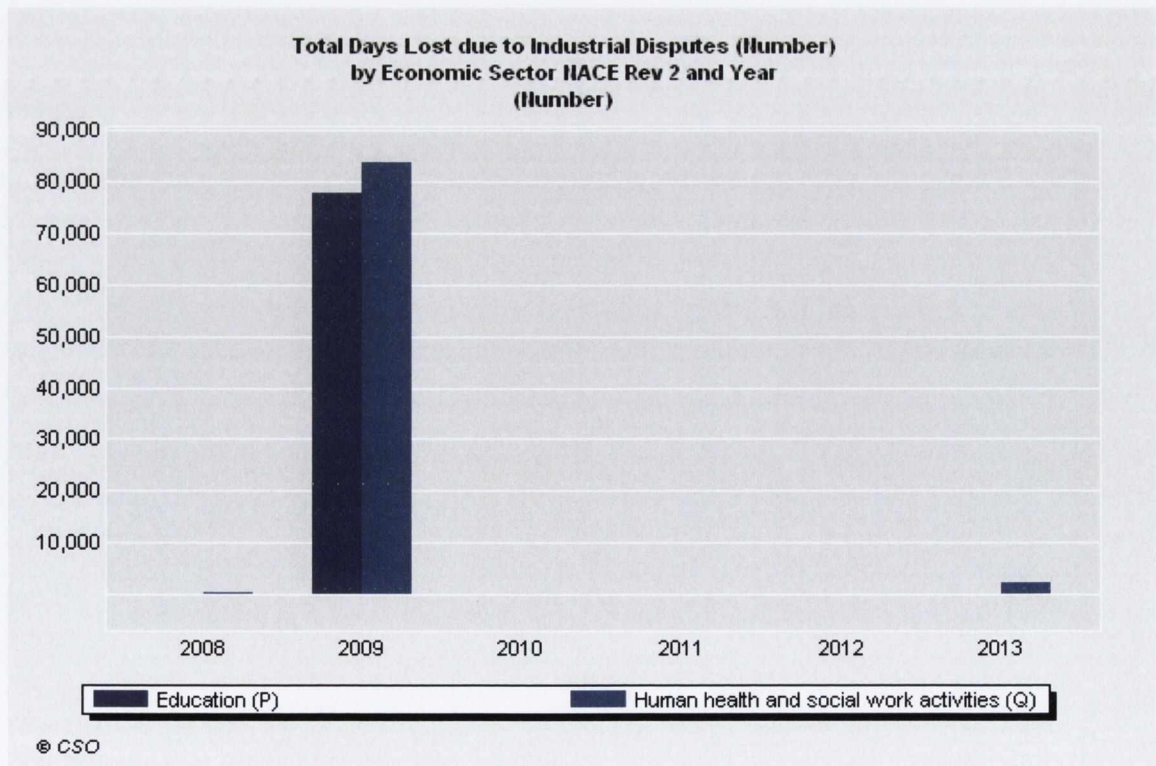
Further, it was noted that "... industrial relations in the [Irish] Health Service are under continuous and sustained pressure" where a disproportionate use of State-provided dispute resolution machinery was "... indicative of the extent of industrial relations activity in the [Irish] Health Service generally". However, despite this perception of the sector, data demonstrates that strike activity, considered as the foremost indicator of IR conflict (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005), remains in line with other public sectors such as Irish education. This is demonstrated in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Healthcare and Education Sectors Compared according to working days lost, 2000-2008



Source: Central Statistics Office, Statbank.

Figure 3.2: Healthcare and Education Sectors Compared according to working days lost, 2009-2013

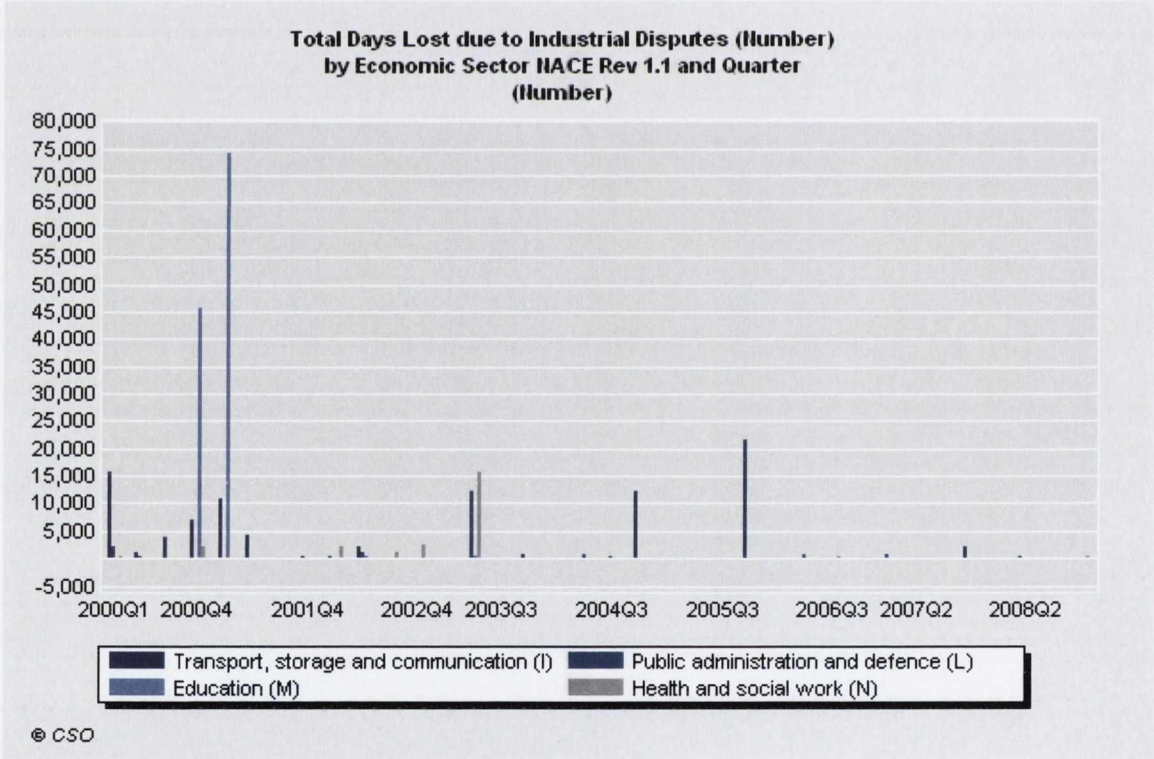


Source: Central Statistics Office, Statbank.

As illustrated in Figure 3.2, there is some deviation between levels in 2009. However, this is likely to be attributable to the public sector strike, and the differences in the numbers employed (Boyle, 2011). Despite this evidence, the sector continues to be described as “highly adversarial, traditional and defensive, with frequent disputes arising over any changes” (Dobbins, 2009b: 11).

Further, when examining the top three sectors most affected by strike activity in Ireland between 2000 and 2009, Irish healthcare was cited less than manufacturing and transport/communications (Carley, 2008, 2010). Figures 3.3 and 3.4 compare strike action, in terms of working days lost<sup>27</sup> in healthcare, education, transport, and public administration and defence. This illustrates that strike activity is comparable or less than other sectors. Therefore, when adopting the traditional indicator of IR conflict - the strike - Irish healthcare is *not* particularly conflict-prone.

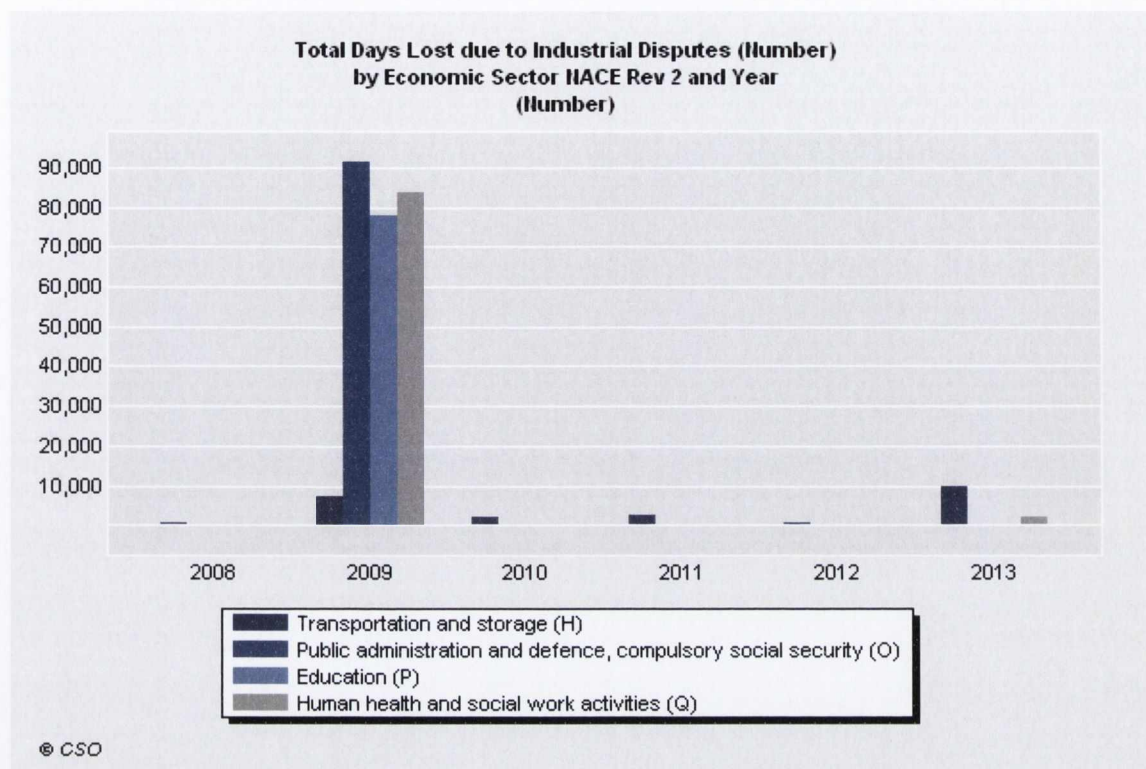
Figure 3.3: Healthcare, Education, Transport Storage & Communication, and Public Administration & Defence compared according to working days lost, 2000-2008



Source: Central Statistics Office, Statbank.

<sup>27</sup> Working days lost is typically considered the most accurate measurement of strike activity (Eurofound, 2009). However, there are limits to this measurement in terms of its failure to include short stoppages (Dobbins, 2009b) and, as is the basis for this work, non-strike expressions of IR conflict.

Figure 3.4: Healthcare, Education, Transport Storage & Communication, and Public Administration & Defence compared according to working days lost, 2009-2013



Source: Central Statistics Office, Statbank.

The Labour Court, as the 'Court of Last Resort', is the last point in a dispute chain before industrial action (LRC, 2001). In this regard, the Labour Court is the point at which parties 'exhaust the process'. Despite this, Cowman and Keating (2013) found few references to strikes or industrial action - or its threat - in cases concerning hospitals over a ten year period. This is notable given the stage of the Labour Court in the dispute process and the role of strike action to apply pressure (Clegg, 1976).

This author asserts that there is an inconsistency between the perception of Irish healthcare as conflict-prone (LRC, 2001; Dobbins, 2009a; Wall, 2009) and strike data for the sector. While the sector continues to be recognised as an exemplar of adversarial relations, this is not reflected in strike data. Further, there is limited evidence of the threat of strike in the Labour Court setting (Cowman & Keating, 2013). However, healthcare exhibits a disproportionate use of third-party institutions, including the Labour Court (Labour Relations Commission, 2001), and evidence of other phenomenon such as absenteeism, turnover, errors and difficulty achieving change. This supports evidence in the UK suggesting that strike activity may not be the most accurate indicator of IR conflict (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005). This divergence between perception and reality provides further impetus to investigate IR conflict more broadly.



### 3.4 CONCLUSION

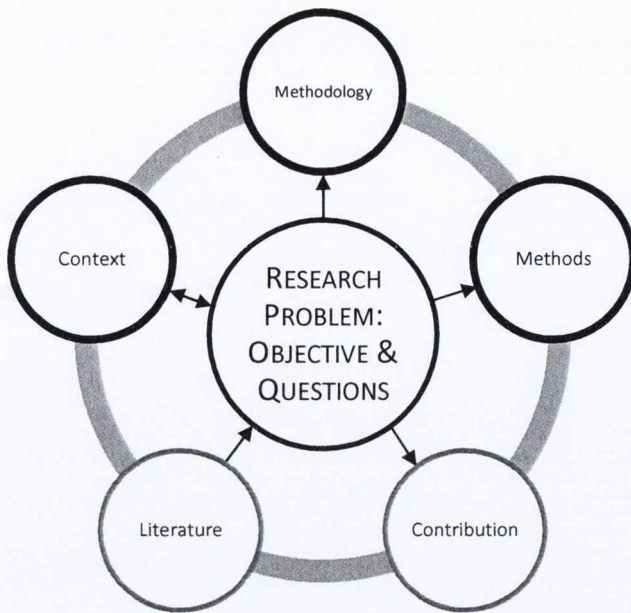
As noted at the outset, the purpose of this chapter was to situate the study of workplace IR conflict in a healthcare setting. Specifically, the chapter sought to explicate this key decision. The sector is comprised of high labour costs and labour intensity (McDermott & Keating, 2014); a multiplicity of professional cohorts (Mintzberg, 1997; Denis *et al.*, 2001); a tribal culture (Davies *et al.*, 2001); diffused loyalties (Buchan, 2004); and a knowledge asymmetry between management and employees (Mintzberg, 1980; Currie *et al.*, 2008). These features, alongside limited resources and infinite demand (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2002), pose significant challenges to the management of people and the employment relationship in healthcare.

Adding further complexity, the sector exhibits a number of IR characteristics: high union density and coverage (Bartram *et al.*, 2005; Kraemer, 2011; Prosser, 2011; Farrelly, 2009, 2012); multi-unionism (Truss, 2003); collectivised professionals (Stanton *et al.*, 2004; Buchan, 2004); and far-reaching precedent (Cowman & Keating, 2013). Taken together these IR features, and the challenges facing management in healthcare, signal the potential for IR conflict.

Amid previous, and arguably less-strained, mandates for cost reduction in healthcare, Bray and White (2002:193) conclude that work intensification will become "an even greater source of conflict between employees and managers in the sector". The 'Great Recession' (Teague & Roche, 2014:176) exacerbates these difficulties and places renewed emphasis on cost reduction, work intensification, and significant reform (Weber, 2011; Norman, 2012; Freeney & Fellenz, 2013; Harney & Monks, 2014; Russell & McGinnity, 2014; McDermott & Keating, 2014).

The Irish healthcare setting is considered conflict-prone and characterised by intractable disputes and high levels of IR activity (LRC, 2001; Dobbins, 2009b). Despite this view, strike activity - as the most widely used benchmark of IR conflict - remains in line with comparable sectors. However, key concerns in the sector - service delivery, quality of patient care; organisational errors; absenteeism; and change implementation - may be indicative of non-strike IR conflict. Thus, the healthcare setting provides a valuable opportunity to explore that the nature, expression and impact of IR conflict beyond the strike.

**METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**



“People who write about methodology often forget that it is a matter of strategy, not of morals. There are neither good nor bad methods but only methods that are more or less effective under particular circumstances in reaching objectives on the way to a distant goal” (Homans, 1949:330 cited in Pettigrew, 1973).

**4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Homans (1949) captures, in part, what Edmondson and McManus (2007) term 'methodological fit'. Beyond the strengths and weaknesses of any particular approach or method, this study has sought consistency. Each element of the research design and its supporting methods must 'pull in the same direction' toward the research objective and its underlying research questions. Drawing on Brannick (1997:3) who noted that research is a "decision making process", the purpose of this chapter is to set out the decisions made for this project and, in light of the above, demonstrate how each element serves both (i) the objective of the study, and (ii) the other elements within the research design. The focus therefore will be on the research methodology, described here as the general approach to undertaking research, and the research methods as the particular techniques employed.

In line with Singleton and Straits (1999:91) who describe research design as "a clear statement of the research problem as well as plans for gathering, processing and interpreting observations intended to provide some resolution to the problem", the chapter will revisit the research objective and questions set out in Chapter 1 and developed in Chapter 2. Largely influenced by the research questions, but also the interpretivist paradigm, the study will utilise a comparative embedded case study method. The following sections will examine the qualitative research approach, philosophical perspectives, and theoretical frameworks adopted. Subsequently, the chapter will present the research strategy and methods including an overview of practical

considerations such as case selection, data collection, data analysis, theory development, research evaluation, and ethics. The chapter concludes with a review of the decisions made as they relate to the research objective, and questions. However, before proceeding to the micro level decisions of research design, the chapter will first revisit the selection of healthcare as the research context.

## 4.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study is situated within the Irish healthcare setting. This decision was informed by Yin (2009) and Flyvbjerg (2004) who discuss the use of exemplar, or extreme cases. These authors emphasise the use of cases that are of public interest and national importance (Yin, 2009) where the setting is "especially problematic" (Flyvbjerg, 2004:425).

Healthcare organisations are characterised by a number of IR features: high labour intensity and high labour costs (Buchan, 2000; McDermott and Keating, 2014); high union density (Kearney, 2010; Dobbins, 2009a); a multiplicity of employee groups and unions (Bartram *et al.*, 2005; Conway & Monks, 2008, 2010); far-reaching precedent (Truss, 2003; Cowman & Keating, 2013); and professional power (Mintzberg, 1980, 1997; McDermott & Keating, 2011). Adding further challenges, the sector is becoming increasingly resource-constrained in Ireland (Norman, 2012) as abroad (Weber, 2011). This has necessitated work intensification and persistent reform efforts (Weber, 2011; McDermott & Keating, 2013, 2014) where cost containment in Irish healthcare is considered a key priority for national recovery (The National Recovery Plan, 2011-2014). The interaction of these features signal adversarial relations in the sector and the potential for IR conflict.

The Irish healthcare context, conforming to expectation, is typically characterised as conflict-prone (LRC, 2001; Wall, 2009; Dobbins, 2009b). However, strike activity - as "the traditional yardstick of workplace relations" (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005:373) - remains in line with comparative public service organisations such as education (Cowman & Keating, 2013), and behind manufacturing and transport/communication sectors between 2000 and 2008<sup>28</sup> (Carley, 2008, 2010). More recently, Cowman and Keating (2013) note limited references to - or threat of - strike action in cases concerning Irish hospitals presented in the Labour Court. This seeming inconsistency between the perception of Irish healthcare as conflict-prone and comparable strike activity indicates the potential role of non-strike expressions, and provides further support to the selection of this research setting.

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<sup>28</sup> The healthcare sector was the most affected in terms of working days lost in 2009, however, this is likely due to the public sector-wide strike and the numbers employed in Irish healthcare (Carley, 2010; Boyle, 2011)

Thus, in sum the Irish healthcare sector was selected due to its national importance, its potential and reputation for IR conflict, and its specific value for the exploration of the non-strike expression and impact of IR conflict. The research objective and questions are revisited in the following section.

#### 4.3 REVISITING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

"Good social science is problem-driven and not methodology-driven, in the sense that it employs those methods... [that] best help answer the questions at hand" (Flyvbjerg, 2004:432).

##### RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

As presented in Chapter 1 and developed in Chapter 2, the research objective of this study is to explore, qualitatively, the nature of workplace IR conflict with a view to adopting a broader perspective on the construct than traditionally employed. In revisiting the rationale underpinning this study, this author notes that research on IR conflict focuses on strike activity despite significant changes in the IR landscape (Dix *et al.*, 2008) including, but not limited to, a sustained decline in strike activity (Scheuer, 2006). However, it is agreed that IR conflict persists (Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Roche & Teague, 2010; Godard, 2011; Gall, 2013; Hebdon & Noh, 2013).

##### Research Questions

The first question as indicated below seeks to explore the expression of IR conflict in the workplace. This moves away from macro levels of analysis of industry, national and supranational perspectives toward the workplace to explore the nature of IR conflict on the frontline, and research its more subtle expressions. The second question seeks to investigate the impact of IR conflict on the workplace using Pondy's (1967) lenses of adaptability, stability and productivity. In doing so this question will move beyond the traditional emphasis on working days lost.

- I. How do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict?
- II. How does workplace industrial relations conflict impact on the workplace?

On this basis the study seeks to make a descriptive and theoretical contribution first and foremost to the IR literature and, to a lesser degree, healthcare management literature. It should be noted at this juncture that the study makes no claim of testable hypotheses or generalisable findings, nor does it seek to quantify workplace IR conflict – or its impact. Central to the research objective, the questions posed and the intended contribution is the qualitative approach adopted. While IR and IR conflict tends to be researched using a quantitative orientation (Godard, 2011), this study –

concerned with the nature of IR conflict – places greater emphasis on 'the quality of things' (Dabbs, 1982 cited in Berg, 2009). This is the basis for Section 4.4.

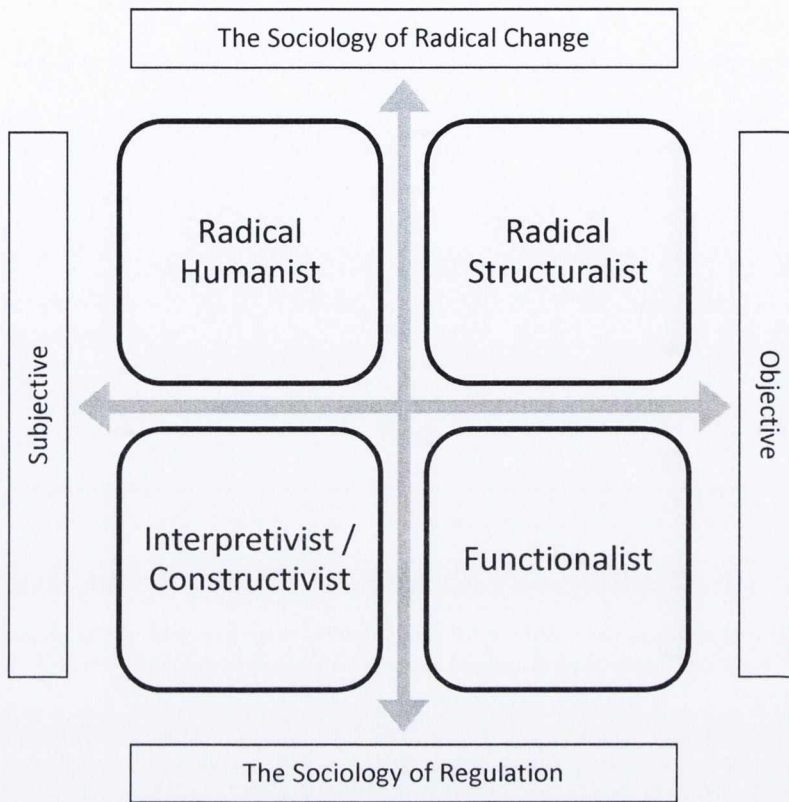
#### **4.4 RESEARCH APPROACH**

As noted, this chapter presents the research design of the project including the 'methodology', or approach, and the research methods employed. This section will discuss the research methodology which in this instance refers to a qualitative orientation underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy, and multiple stakeholder theory as the guiding theoretical framework.

The research methods and the approach to data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) are inextricably linked to the researcher's "theoretical underpinnings" derived from philosophical issues such as epistemology and ontology (Hussey & Hussey, 1997:54; Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The first refers to the nature of knowledge, 'who can be a knower', and the second describes the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This section will consider these issues, and the implications for research methods.

This research has adopted a qualitative approach. While a more detailed explication of the philosophical underpinnings of this research decision will be provided in Section 4.5, this section will explore the qualitative/quantitative distinction. Central to qualitative research is the ontological assumption that reality is a subjective and socially constructed phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). This contrasts with quantitative research which assumes an objective and independent reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, while authors engage in vehement opposition to the 'other side', referring to 'the paradigm war' between 'quants' and 'quals' (Kohlbacher, 2006), the more accurate divergence in research is that between subjective-objective positions. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1

Figure 4.1: Research Orientation: Paradigmatic Origins



Adapted from Burrell & Morgan (1992:22)

While the approach and methods employed are linked to the researcher's philosophical stance (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), Dawson (2009) notes that there has been a movement towards using a research approach, and associated methods, most appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation. This is echoed by Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:15) who note that researchers can adopt a 'problem centric' approach where the research questions drive methodological decisions:

"Different approaches lead researchers to different kinds of topics and questions. Therefore researchers may adopt different approaches for different projects. This is a vital part of a problem-centric way of conducting research. A problem-centric way of doing research means that the research questions are at the center of research design choices. Methods are selected in light of their ability to address specific questions. This is an integral part of holistic practice"

Existing research on IR conflict tends to adopt a quantitative approach to investigation (Godard, 2011), and focuses on IR conflict at the industry, national or supra-national levels with a focus on strike activity. The impetus for this research project and its methodological approach stems from the limitations of this approach. It is postulated that a quantitative appraisal of IR conflict fails to

capture the complexity and richness of the phenomenon. The dominance of the quantitative approach in the investigation of strikes (Franzosi, 1989) as the foremost indicator of IR conflict (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005) does not reflect the interactive (Jaffee, 2007) and interdependent (Sexton, 1996) nature of conflict. Further, it is also noted by several authors (see Pondy, 1967; Boulding, 1962; Jehn, 1992) in organisational literatures, that conflict is influenced by the perception of individuals. These issues not well accessed by quantitative methods. This is recognised by Berg (2009), drawing on Dabbs (2009:3), who distinguishes between quantitative and qualitative schools of thought:

"... the notion of *quality* is essential to the nature of things. On the other hand, *quantity* is elementally an amount of something. Quality refers to the what, how, when and where of a thing - its essence and ambiance. Qualitative research, thus, refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things."

It can be argued that existing research, which abstracts IR conflict away from (i) those who experience it, and (ii) the relationship in which it exists, has limitations. This is consistent with Guba & Lincoln (1994:106) who noted that one of the major critiques levelled at the quantitative orientation was the "exclusion of meaning and purpose", highlighting that "human beings cannot be understood without reference to the meanings and purpose attached by human actors to their activities". While there is value in understanding the macro level patterns of IR conflict, a qualitative micro level study of IR conflict provides a more fine-grained understanding. Godard (2011:299), calling for research on IR conflict, argues that "there is, at a minimum, a need to consider adopting one or more alternative methodological and ontological lenses to complement or even supplant the one provided by conventional [IR] research".

It is argued that qualitative research allows us to investigate a phenomenon within its context (Hartley, 1994) and is "fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:10). Thus qualitative research, and its subjectivist orientation, is best placed to provide an investigation of workplace IR conflict "that is more sensitive to the complexities of social phenomena" (Bryman, 1984:82). As discussed in Chapter 2, Hebdon and Noh (2013:43) note that "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace conflict". A qualitative approach is most suitable to serve the research objective of exploring the nature or 'essence' of IR conflict (Berg, 2009). Kumar (2011), writing from a positivist and somewhat critical standpoint, acknowledges that qualitative research designs are more appropriate for "exploring the variation and diversity in any aspect of social life, whereas... quantitative research [is] more suited to finding out the extent of this variation and diversity". Thus, it is concluded that qualitative techniques offer considerable value to the investigation of IR

conflict - which has at its core the human process (Kornhauser, 1954) of interaction (Rahim, 2002); perception (Pondy, 1967); and interdependence (Sexton, 1996).

This study is descriptive and exploratory. Therefore a qualitative approach is appropriate (Yin, 2003), and consistent with the intended contribution (Eisenhardt, 1989; Whetton, 1989). The philosophical stance imbedded in this discussion is presented in more detail in the ensuing section.

#### **4.5 PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

"If there were only one truth, you couldn't paint a hundred canvases on the same theme"  
(Pablo Picasso, 1966 cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009:308).

As stated, a key distinction in research is of objectivity versus subjectivity. Firmly in these two camps stand the opposing philosophical perspectives of positivism and interpretivism. This research, informed by the researcher's ontological and epistemological position, and the focus of the inquiry, was located within the interpretivist strand (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) or paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This approach, underpinned by constructivism, is based on the assumption that reality is socially constructed, and that investigation should focus on the subjective experience of individuals. This departs from the now dominant position adopted in extant literature which is best described by the Positivist or Post-Positivist tradition (Godard, 2011; Whitfield & Strauss, 2008). These perspectives consider a singular and independent reality. The rationale informing this departure was based on the objective stance and the detachment of research from the human experience. Thus, the Radical Structuralist and Functionalist paradigms identified by Burrell and Morgan (1992) were also excluded as the objective orientation and focus on quantitative inquiry is not suited to this research project. Despite Godard (1993, 2011) noting its relevance for IR, the Critical Realist approach - rooted in an objectivist view - was similarly excluded.

The critical strand is said to act as an umbrella for two main approaches. The first, the postmodern approach, centres on dominant ideology and the influence of power in creating a self-replicating process of oppression (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The second strand, post-structural, emerged from several social justice movements and includes feminist theory and critical race theory (ibid). These approaches were rejected, along with the Radical Humanist paradigm which places emphasis on social constraints and their impact on people (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), due to their limited relevance for the focus of the inquiry. It was thought that the critical strand and its conceptualisation of power differences would imbue the research with an overly Marxist assumption that employees are oppressed, and that such oppression is



engendered by society's internalisation of the 'dominant ideology'. While Marxist theory as part of the industrial relations perspective on conflict has been discussed, and with it the relevance of the power asymmetry of the employment relationship, it is not thought to be the sole feature in the relationship. The Radical Humanist paradigm, while focusing on conflict, is orientated towards radical societal conflict which is not the focus of this investigation.

There are, however, further distinctions within the interpretivist paradigm including social interactionism; dramaturgy; phenomenology; and ethnomethodology (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This study has adopted what Merriam (2002:37) terms "a basic interpretive qualitative study" underpinned by symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. Symbolic interactionism focuses on how people interpret meaning based on their interaction with society and other people (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This perspective is relevant to the study at hand which focuses on conflict arising from interaction between employees; management; and union(s). Phenomenology, concerned with how individuals interpret to create meaning in their everyday lives, links to the role of perception in conflict (Pondy, 1967; Jehn, 1992). Merriam (2002:93) writes that "... the focus is thus neither on the human subject nor the human world but the essence of meaning of this interaction". Taken together, these approaches are concerned with (i) how people interpret their experiences, (ii) how they construct their worlds or reality, and (iii) what meaning they attach to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In this regard, informed by Pondy (1967) and Bishop (2004) expressions of IR conflict, and their impact on the workplace are defined by the participant.

The research objective was to explore the expression and impact of workplace IR conflict, where conflict (IR and otherwise) is conceptualised as a relational (Sessa, 1996), interdependent (Brett, 1984) and cognitive process (Jehn, 1992) determined in part by the subjective experience of individuals. Thus, adopting a problem-centric approach (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), there is alignment between the focus of inquiry and the 'Basic Interpretivist' perspective underpinned by symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. However, Miles and Huberman (1994:5) note that "... all of us - realists, interpretivists and critical theorists - are closer to the center, with multiple overlaps". Thus while the process of research necessitates a clear identification of our assumptions, perspectives can be more alike in practice than is typically recognised.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

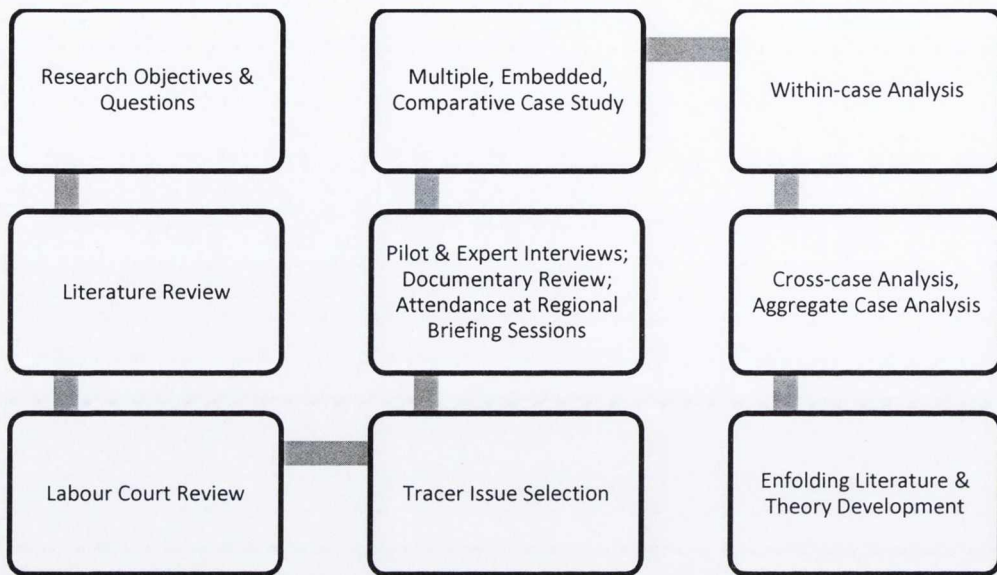
In addition to the philosophical perspective the inquiry is also "framed by some disciplinary-based concepts, model or theory" (Merriam, 2002:39). Owing to the pluralist underpinnings of IR, this research has adopted Multiple Stakeholder Theory (MST) to guide methodological decisions. The

pluralist framework recognises that the interests of management and employees diverge (Hollinshead *et al.*, 2003). Thus, conflict is viewed as an inherent feature of IR (Salamon, 2000) and conceptualised as legitimate and rational (Rollinson & Dundon, 2007). Consistent with the pluralist view, MST recognises that parties have different “stakes” in organisational decisions (Edwards, 1986). It is also argued that MST is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings discussed in the previous sections, most notably the interpretive stance which focuses on how reality is a function of social construction - and individual perspectives. This framework acknowledges elements in IR, and in the healthcare setting. Freeman *et al.* (2010:172) note that MST has “begun to influence the work of academics in health care”. In practical terms, MST has guided research design in a number of areas including the use of public-voluntary and public-HSE case sites; interviewee selection; and stakeholder-adapted data collection instruments.

#### **4.6 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The research strategy centred on the use of the exploratory case study method with an embedded comparative design. These elements are considered in the following section. Eisenhardt (1989) explains that unlike quantitative research, qualitative case studies do not use random sampling but rather adopt theoretical sampling where cases are selected based on the likelihood of observing the phenomenon of interest. To facilitate theoretical sampling, a tracer issue - where a single strategy was followed through progression - was selected to act as a context in which IR conflict was likely to emerge. In this regard the use of the tracer issue to seek out IR conflict is reflective of the emphasis on exemplar cases (Yin, 2009; Pan & Tan, 2011), and Flyvbjerg's (2004) discussion of information-orientated sampling in which cases are selected to maximise variation. In order to establish the existence of IR conflict, and inform design issues such as tracer issue selection and data analysis, a review of Labour Court recommendations was undertaken. Elements of the research strategy are presented in Figure 4.2. Cognisant of Yin (2009:1), the study is "linear but iterative".

Figure 4.2: Research Strategy Elements



As noted, strike activity has declined nationally and internationally (Scheuer, 2006). Further, despite the perception that the Irish health service is 'conflict prone', strike activity remains in line with other public sectors such as education (Cowman & Keating, 2013). In order to establish the existence of IR conflict, Labour Court recommendations over the 10 year period of 2000-2010<sup>29</sup> relating to the healthcare sector, and specifically hospitals<sup>30</sup>, were collected and analysed thematically. The purpose of this methodological device was to locate the themes of IR conflict in the hospital sector and facilitate the identification of a tracer issue.

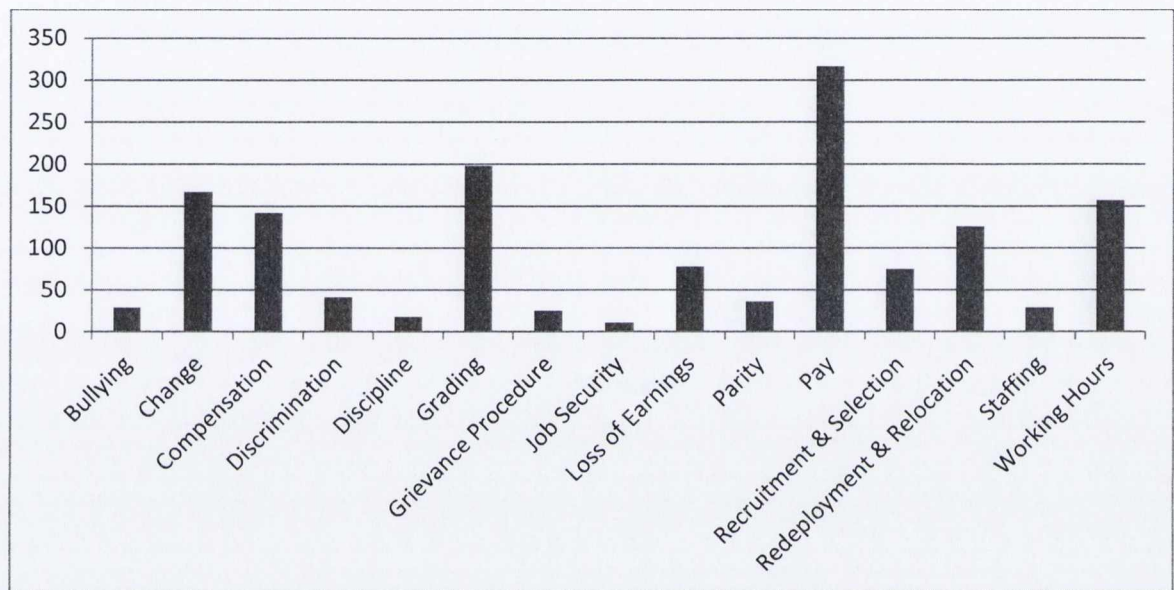
While there are an array of IR institutions in the Irish system, the Labour Court was chosen based on its role as the 'Court of Last Resort'. This indicates that it is the point in a dispute directly before strike action. In this regard the Labour Court, amidst a decline in strike activity, represents the last known location of IR conflict. In addition, the Labour Court – inclusive of disputes concerning interest and rights and various pieces of employment legislation – provides a more holistic picture of IR conflict relative to the Equality Tribunal or the Employment Appeals Tribunal. Further, Labour Court data, unlike outcomes of the LRC or Rights Commissioners, is freely available. In this regard the researcher remains cognisant of the risk associated with case study research (Pan & Tan, 2011) which is heightened in this study due to the healthcare setting and the sensitive nature of the research topic. Therefore, for the purposes of an ancillary methodological device, further access negotiation was considered imprudent.

<sup>29</sup> The time period of the review was determined by its purpose: to enable selection of a tracer issue. Once the tracer issue was identified, further analysis of Labour Court data, though interesting, was beyond the remit of this study.

<sup>30</sup> Hospitals were selected to improve (i) feasibility by reducing the scale of the investigation, and (ii) transferability. Moreover, hospitals more closely conform to the pluralist dynamics that informed the selection of the healthcare setting than other organisations in the industry.

Over 990 recommendations were selected and reviewed, where 385 were retained for thematic analysis<sup>31</sup>. Findings of this review (Cowman & Keating, 2013) indicated that despite limited strike action there was evidence of conflict in the sector. Further, as illustrated in Figure 4.3, the substance of IR conflict most frequently related to pay, grading, change, working hours and redeployment. These themes, once identified, enabled the identification of a tracer issue where IR conflict was likely to emerge. This approach, in line with Pan and Tan (2011), allowed the researcher reduce risk associated with case study research.

Figure 4.3: References in Labour Court Recommendations According to Issue



This aspect of the research strategy also provided further impetus to the investigation of non-strike expressions of IR conflict where - despite the role of the Labour Court as the 'Court of Last Resort' - there were limited references to, or threat of, strike action (Cowman & Keating, 2013). In addition the doctoral researcher gained experience in data analysis with a smaller data set prior to case analysis. The Labour Court review also helped to link international literature to the Irish context.

Other elements of the research strategy included the use of expert interviews, pilot interviews and context interviews to develop the interview schedule, along with attendance at regional briefing sessions associated with the selected tracer issue. This research strategy provided an informed basis upon which to investigate workplace IR conflict.

<sup>31</sup> Inclusion criteria: (i) cases falling within the unit of a hospital, or (ii) directly concerning a hospital or a number of hospitals where the employer was stated as the, Health Board, the HSE or the Health Service Executive Employers Agency (HSE-EA).

## TRACER ISSUE

The tracer method (see McDermott & Keating, 2012, Denis *et al.*, 2001) involves selecting a single strategy and following it through its progression. A current HSE HR strategy, the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (Workforce Planning Strategy for the Health Services 2009–2012), was chosen as a tracer issue for this research project. This strategy acted as a context within which workplace IR conflict could emerge. Consistent with the use of phenomenology, this allowed participants to discuss the expression and impact of IR conflict with reference to real events and experiences.

The Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (henceforth LMRS) necessitates an extended working day (8-8), revised on-call payments, changes in skill mix and potential redeployment. The Medlab setting and the LMRS is examined in further detail in Chapter 5. The use of the tracer method was facilitated by the research strategy and the review of Labour Court recommendations where the themes of IR conflict in the setting were matched to a live strategy in order to 'locate' IR conflict. The consistency between the themes of IR conflict in the setting and the provisions of the LMRS is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Issues of IR conflict in Hospitals, Labour Court 2000-2010 compared to LMRS Provisions

<b>Themes of IR Conflict in Irish Hospitals</b>	<b>Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy Provisions</b>
Pay	Revised on-call payments
Grading	Implications for promotion opportunities*
Change	Changes to working hours, skill mix, work practices & place of work
Working Hours	Extended working day, 8-8 and Moves toward 5 over 7 roster
Compensation	Loss of earnings claim
Redeployment /Relocation	Redeployment necessary for reconfiguration
Loss of Earnings	Loss of earnings claim due to revised on-call
Discrimination	-
Parity	Issues pertaining to parity between revised on-call payments for urban laboratory staff versus rural equivalents*
Bullying	-

\*These issues were identified through analysis of interview data.

In line with Pan and Tan's (2011) focus on risk reduction in case study research, this strategy was (i) live at the time of data collection, and (ii) identified as a national and industry priority indicating that it would survive during and after the research process. Further, the cases selected under this tracer issue were more likely to conform with Yin's (2009) criteria for exemplary cases, a characteristic of which is national importance. The LMRS was identified as a priority in several national arenas. The National Recovery Plan (2011-2014:69) refers specifically to the need for lab

reconfiguration: “[m]ajor change will be introduced in medical laboratory services and associated work practices”. The Recovery Plan also notes the need for redeployment: “[s]taff will be redeployed within and across service locations in the publicly-funded health service, and in the wider public service, as necessary” (ibid). Adopting an industry focus, the Department of Health and Children report ‘An Integrated Workforce Planning Strategy for the Health Services’ (2009-2012) places an emphasis on workforce flexibility and redeployment in the context of service centralisation, skill mix, and the extended working day. These objectives are central to the LMRS (Public Sector Agreement 2010-2014; Implementing a New System of Service Delivery for Laboratory Medicine Services, 2007).

The Medlab setting is consistent with the rational underpinning the selection of healthcare as a research context: growing demand, a labour intensive service, and a mandate to reduce costs. Further, the Medlab setting includes a number of occupational groups and professional specialisms including medical lab scientists of different grades and areas of expertise; medical lab aides; phlebotomists; consultants; administrative; and support staff. Conforming to broader characteristics of the healthcare setting, union membership and coverage is high while multi-unionism prevails<sup>32</sup>. While these features are consistent with the broader healthcare context, the Medlab cohort also represents a departure in healthcare research where nurses and doctors are most studied. Thus, while this setting includes a range of participants with different professional loyalties alongside multi-unionism, this author also includes degrees of patient contact and in doing so provides greater depth to existing healthcare research.

#### **4.7 RESEARCH METHODS**

The research methods used, while referenced at the outset, will be expounded in this section in terms of design and practical application.

##### **CASE STUDY METHOD**

The case study method, flexible in its application, can be defined in several ways depending on its specific objectives. Berg (2009:317) notes that some authors refer to the method as an in depth examination of one setting, subject or event while others define the method as "an attempt to systematically investigate an event or a set of related events with the specific aim of describing and explaining this phenomenon". Yin (2009:18), a key author on the subject, defines a case study as: "... an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". While the case study method has significant benefits, research is a decision-

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<sup>32</sup> Unions in the Medlab setting include the MLSA; SIPTU; IMPACT; and the PAI

making process (Brannick, 1997) and the decision of methods is critical. Thus, the rationale for using the case study method will be elucidated. Methodological decisions are made in the context of three determining factors: the research problem (Dawson, 2009), the philosophical stance of the researcher (Burrell & Morgan, 1994) and, in line with Guba & Lincoln's (1994) emphasis on community consent in determining rigour, the intended area of contribution.

The case study method is consistent with the "how" questions posed (Dooley, 2002; Yin, 2009) and the theoretical framework of MST. Additionally, the case study method is recognised as being sensitive to the influence of context (Hartley, 1994; Yin, 2009). This provides value to the current study where relations between management, unions and employees are recognised as 'deeply contextualised' (Flanders, 1974), while the nature of IR conflict is recognised as context-specific (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Cappelli & McKersie, 1987; Barbash, 1979). Moreover, the case study method is consistent with research problem: an investigation into the expression and impact of IR conflict. As stated, conflict is a socially constructed and interactive phenomenon. Drawing on this, and Yin (2009:4) who notes that "the method is... relevant the more that your questions require an extensive and 'in-depth' description of some social phenomenon", it is argued that this investigation is best served by a case study method.

In line with Guba and Lincoln (1994) and their focus on community consent, methods must be considered in the context of the intended areas of contribution. Whitfield and Strauss (2008) highlight that, though exhibiting decline, IR research has a strong tradition of inductive, context-specific, case study research. This researcher asserts that, as previously discussed, a qualitative workplace level investigation provides value. Dooley (2002:336) notes:

"Case study research generally does not lend itself well to generalization or prediction. The researcher who embarks on case study research is usually interested in a specific phenomenon and wishes to understand it completely, not by controlling variables but rather by observing all of the variables and their interacting relationships".

While 'under siege' in IR research, the case study method is increasingly popular in healthcare research (Devers, 2011). In addition, while the explorative case study is effective in motivating new areas of enquiry (Siggelkow, 2007), Pan and Tan (2011:163) note that "one of the most effective ways of using [exploratory case studies] is the inductive derivation of new theories". Thus, the method is consistent with the intended descriptive and theoretical contribution (Pan & Tan, 2011; Eisenhardt, 1989). In line with this view, Siggelkow (2007:21) explains that inductive case research can "sharpen existing theory by pointing to gaps and beginning to fill them".

The factors outlined above, combined with the limited ability of the researcher to control the behavioural events of interest and the consistency between case study research and the

interpretive paradigm (Yin, 2003), made the case study an appropriate method for this investigation. Within the case method it is possible to employ qualitative or quantitative evidence. However, rich qualitative data is most appropriate for this research problem. The rationale here is based on (i) the descriptive and exploratory orientation of the research, and (ii) the research objective to investigate the nature, or 'essence' (Berg, 2009) of workplace IR conflict. The following sections will review the case study design.

### **Case Study Design**

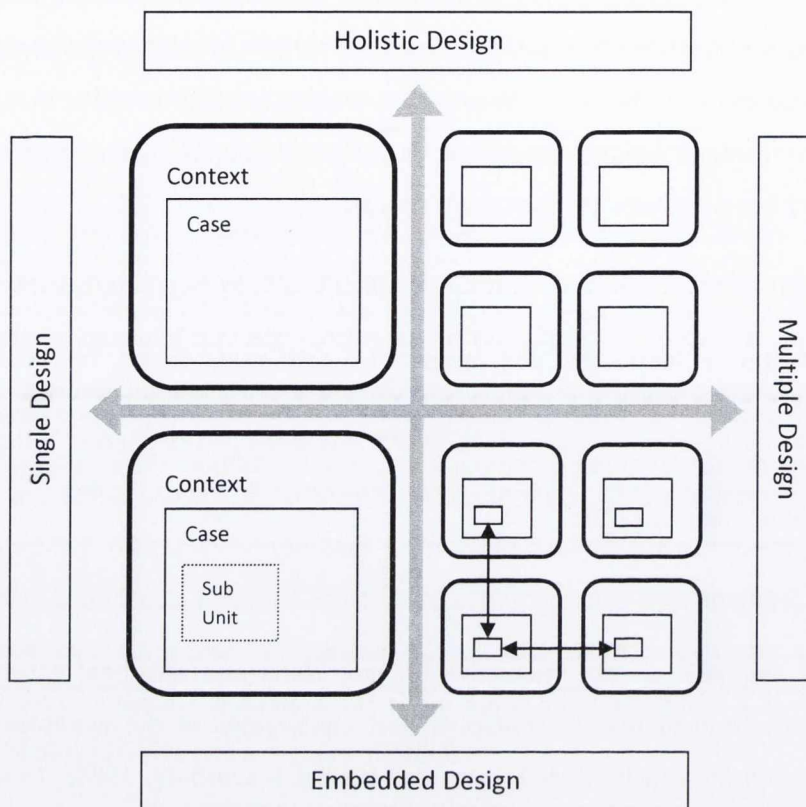
The research adopted an embedded and comparative case study design. Two key choices are considered in this section. The rationale underpinning the use of an embedded case is reviewed before considering the use of multiple comparative cases. In addition, the section will explain the factors used to inform case selection.

#### **Embedded Case Study**

In line with the emphasis on the interactive (Rahim, 2002) and relational nature of conflict (Sexton, 1996), it is argued that IR conflict is best investigated in the workplace where the employment *relationship* can be directly observed (Callus & Lansbury, 1988). Thus, concerned with the workplace, this study has adopted an embedded design where the embedded unit, as the workplace, is the "setting in which work is performed" (Masters & Albright, 2002:14). The case study design is illustrated in Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4: Case Study Design



Adapted from Yin (2009:46)

#### *Levels and Unit of Analysis*

The level(s) and unit(s) of analysis determined by the research question are concerned with defining 'what' the case is, and its boundaries (Yin, 2003). In line with the use of an embedded design, the laboratory was the main level of analysis where the overarching unit of analysis in this study is the hospital organisation<sup>33</sup>. However, Yin (2003) noted that there is often a failure to return from the embedded case (the laboratory) to the larger unit (the hospital). This was addressed by seeking interviews with the IR/HR Managers in each site. Due in part to the blurred boundary between the hospital and the governance structure of the HSE, interviews were conducted outside the boundary of the case, at HSE level for context and design purposes.

#### Multiple Comparative Design

The multiple case study design was comparative along two dimensions. The first comparative dimension was hospital type. There are three types of hospitals in the Irish system: public-HSE,

<sup>33</sup> The hospital unit was selected to improve transferability. The hospital setting most closely reflects the plurality of the healthcare setting, where other healthcare settings, more focused in their area of delivery, tend to have less variation in employee groups.

public-voluntary, and private<sup>34</sup>. This research included sites in both the public-HSE and public-voluntary hospitals. By including both types this research allowed for theoretical replication and the possibility that (i) differences will occur across groups and (ii) that these may be related to, in line with MST and the pluralist underpinnings of IR, differences in stakeholder interests. Secondly, as the tracer issue involves both hospital types, including public-HSE and public-voluntary cases a more comprehensive view of its implementation is provided. Finally, research network contacts in both arenas reduced the access risk associated with case research (Pan & Tan, 2011).

The direction of the LMRS was used as the second comparative dimension. While it was expected that the provisions of the strategy outlined in Table 4.1 would provide fertile ground to investigate IR conflict, it was thought that the 'palatability' of the strategy in terms of redeployment could influence workplace IR conflict. Redeployment in this setting can be within or beyond the hospital unit. Due to the nature of laboratory medicine, redeployment under this initiative is largely beyond the hospital unit. There are two strategy directions relating to the LMRS: hospitals of origin and destination hospitals. Under the tracer issue a hospital of origin will 'lose' cold lab services and redeploy staff resources accordingly. In contrast, a destination hospital or 'hub' will gain cold lab services and staff. Thus, sites designated as hub labs were expected to exhibit IR conflict differently than those designated as spokes due to the contentious issue of redeployment. This view was informed by the findings of the Labour Court Review.

#### Case Selection

Case selection was largely determined by replication logic where, in keeping with Yin (2009) and Eisenhardt (1989), the study employed both literal and theoretical replication. Thus, two of each hospital type and two of each strategy direction were cross-referenced to facilitate comparison within and across groups. This was informed by Flyvbjerg (2004) and the use of information-orientated selection where cases within the exemplar or extreme healthcare setting were selected for maximum variation. Figure 4.5 shows a four-case selection matrix, and signals replication logic with arrows. In addition, case selection was informed by access negotiation (Pan & Tan, 2011) which is discussed below.

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<sup>34</sup> Private hospitals were excluded due to (i) the need for focus and feasibility, and (ii) the LMRS is not applicable to private hospitals. Further research of workplace IR conflict in public and private settings would provide value.

Figure 4.5: Case Selection Matrix and Replication Logic

		Strategy Direction	
		Destination Hospital	Hospital of Origin
Hospital Type	Public Voluntary		Public Voluntary
	Public HSE		Public HSE

### *Access Negotiation*

Despite positioning the research in public-voluntary and public-HSE hospitals, negotiating access proved a lengthy task characterised by high levels of uncertainty. The first stage of negotiations involved gaining sponsorship of the research project at the Assistant National Director level of the HSE. This cooperation from the Assistant National Director - charged with implementation of the LMRS - was critical. The researcher was permitted access to strategy documents, board papers and attended all four regional briefing sessions. In addition, the Assistant National Director provided introductions to Laboratory managers in each site, providing the research with legitimacy and facilitating local level access negotiations. This approach was also used as a 'gate keeper' tactic in preserving the ethical conduct of the research (Section 4.11). The research was formally presented to the laboratory managers in writing after initial contact was made by the Assistant National Director. The researcher also proposed to meet with each Lab manager and its staff prior to data collection to address any queries or concerns. Email correspondence in advance of data collection was also used.

Access negotiation and data collection was heavily influenced by the 'live' status of the strategy. Thus, progress was largely determined by progress at HSE level, emergent delays with approval of the strategy at Board level, and the announcement of hub labs. This was further complicated by major scale change planned in the HSE, including the introduction of hospital groups and the planned reorganisation of the HSE into directorates which threatened ownership of the LMRS and posed further delays to implementation. This uncertainty was managed with regular interviews with the Assistant National Director.

While it was planned that data collection would take place after the announcement of the strategy, delays at HSE level required an alternative course of action. It was thought that the two cases which were predicted as hub labs by the Assistant National Director represented a lower risk in terms of data collection. The Assistant National Director identified two hospitals which would most certainly be hubs (or destination hospitals) in any regional configuration. Access and

data collection were pursued in these sites first. Access was then negotiated with the third case which was identified by the Assistant National Director as a planned spoke lab where there were no circumstances under which this site would be selected as a hub. With regard to the final case, the Assistant National Director identified one lab that, while in the running in the early stages, was now unlikely to be selected as a hub. While data collection was delayed in many intervals to allow for the announcement of hub labs, due to resource constraints and practical considerations, data collection had to proceed. Table 4.2 provides a descriptive comparison of the four case sites which ranged from medium to large.

Table 4.2: Comparing Case Sites

Descriptor	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Hospital Type	P. Voluntary	P.HSE	P. HSE	P. Voluntary
Predicted Strategy Direction	Hub	Hub	Spoke	Spoke
Media Hits	> 1000	> 2000	< 1000	> 1000

### Data Collection

There are three main sources of data for qualitative studies: interviews, observation, and documents (Merriam, 2002). In line with the problem-centric approach (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), the choice of data collection method within case research was determined by the research questions wherein this author uses the method that best captures the data of interest. This research, drawing on phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, was largely concerned with the experience and interaction of people. Therefore the interview data collection method was most appropriate. However researchers are advised to employ more than one method of data collection to 'triangulate' the phenomenon under investigation and improve the validity (Merriam, 2002) or credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of findings. Thus, the primary data collection method of semi-structured interviews is supplemented with observation and document analysis. The integration of multiple data sources and how they pertain to each case is discussed after the data collection methods, and their application, are outlined. However, attention now turns to the preparation phase of data collection and the development of a case study protocol.

### Case Study Protocol

Yin (2009:79) argues that a case study protocol, which sets out the procedures to be followed in conducting the case study, is "desirable under all circumstances, but it is essential if you [the researcher] are doing a multiple-case study". Drawing on Yin (2009) and Eisenhardt (1989) and the role of the protocol in improving reliability/dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a case study

protocol was compiled prior to the data collection phase. The protocol outlined the background and relevance of the study, the research objectives and, in line with Yin (2009), field procedures, case study questions for the researcher, and a guide for the case study report.

## Interviews

The interview data collection method, consistent with phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and the importance of 'lived experience' (Silverman, 2011), was selected as the primary data collection method. O'Regan (2009:61) notes that qualitative interviewing grounded in conversation has an "epistemology [that] is typically more constructivist than positivist". Further, Yin (2009:107-109) identifies the interview as "[o]ne of the most important sources of case study information" because "most case studies are about human affairs or behavioural events". Thus the interview method is consistent with the use of case studies and the research problem.

In each case contact was made with the Lab Manager who, following his/her agreement to participate, was issued a list of desired interviewees. This was modified iteratively throughout the process of data collection. It was critical to include multiple groups and different hierarchical levels to reduce bias (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), improve 'fairness' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and reflect the interests of multiple stakeholders in the employment relationship. A list of desired participants and actual participants is presented in Appendix 1. 42 case interviews were conducted, lasting on average between 40 minutes and three hours. A further 10 interviews beyond case boundaries were conducted for design and context purposes.

In order to inform the design of the interview schedule and link international literature to the Irish context, interviews were conducted with five experts (see Appendix 2). These interviews, along with the literature reviews and Labour Court review, were used to create semi-structured interview schedules. Table 4.3 presents these schedules and the adaptations to multiple stakeholders. The schedules were then piloted with three healthcare employees. The questions were augmented after each pilot. In addition, the interview schedules were reviewed by the research supervisor and two 'critical colleagues' with expertise in (i) interviews, and/or (ii) IR in the hospital domain. In line with the semi-structured design, questions were added based on individual responses. The triangulated pattern of interview schedule design is presented in Figure 4.6.

Table 4.3: Stakeholder Adapted Interview Schedules

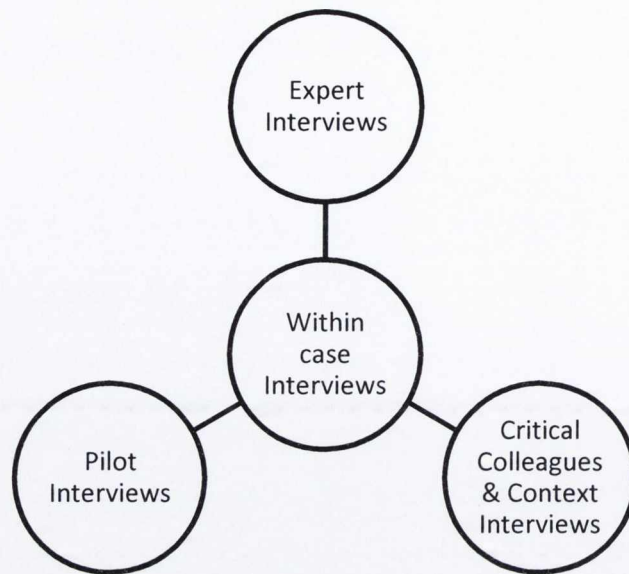
Interview Themes	HR/IR Manager	Laboratory Management	Employee	Union Representative
Role				
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you briefly describe your role in the hospital?</li> <li>• How has your role changed over time?</li> <li>• In your experience what types of conflict emerge in your workplace? Can you describe the types?</li> <li>• How would you describe your workplace with regard to the level of conflict?....low, medium or high?</li> <li>• In what ways do employees/ your subordinates/ you or your colleagues/ your members express dissatisfaction or conflict with your work?</li> <li>• What, in your experience, are the behavioural manifestations of conflict in the employment relationship?</li> <li>• There has been a decline in strike activity, in your experience where has conflict gone? (IR/HR &amp; TU)</li> </ul>			
Experience/ Management / Rep. of IR Conflict with employees, subordinates, employer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you briefly describe the policy for managing disputes between employees and their manager or employer?</li> <li>• At what point in a workplace dispute do you or the HR department get involved?</li> <li>• Can you describe an experience where there has been a grievance or conflict between the employer/manager, and one or more of the employees, where you were involved? How did you respond? What was the outcome? Can you describe another situation where you responded differently, or where the outcome was different?</li> <li>• In your experience how do employees 'push back' when they have grievances or are dissatisfied in work?</li> <li>• Generally what are the types of grievances that employees have with their manager or employer?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe an experience where there has been a grievance or conflict between you and one or more of your subordinates?</li> <li>• How did you respond? Why did you respond this way?</li> <li>• What was the outcome of this situation? If a similar situation arose would you respond differently? Why?</li> <li>• Can you describe another situation where you did respond differently - or where the outcome was different?</li> <li>• In your experience how do your subordinates 'push back' when grievances arise?</li> <li>• Generally, what types of grievances do employees have?</li> <li>• Generally, what kinds of issues arise when you are dissatisfied with your subordinates?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe an experience where you have had a grievance with your employer - be that the HSE or the hospital?</li> <li>• How did you respond in this situation? Why did you respond this way?</li> <li>• What was the outcome here? Were you satisfied with this outcome?</li> <li>• If a similar situation arose again - would you respond differently?</li> <li>• Can you describe another situation where you did respond differently?</li> <li>• Why did you respond this way?</li> <li>• What was the outcome of this situation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you an experience where you, OR the employees you represent have had a grievance with the employer? How did you respond in this situation? Why?</li> <li>• When employees are dissatisfied with the employer how do you they 'push back'; cope?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally what kinds of issues arise when you, the manager or the employer are dissatisfied with employees?</li> </ul>				
Experience of IR conflict with manager	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you describe an experience where you have had a grievance with your manager or supervisor?</li> <li>How did you respond in this situation?</li> <li>In your experience how does your manager attempt to manage grievances or conflict?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you describe an experience where you have had a grievance with the manager? How did you respond? Why?</li> <li>How do you - or those you represent - 'push back' when grievances arise with either the employer or the manager?</li> </ul>	
Experience of IR conflict - Choice of Response	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When you are dissatisfied with your employer or manager, how do you 'push back', how do you cope?</li> <li>In your experience how do your colleagues respond, or push back, when grievances arise?</li> <li>Who do you discuss your grievances with? either formally or informally?</li> <li>At what point do you contact your union representative?</li> <li>What do you do before - or instead of - contacting your union representative?</li> <li>Would you consider going on strike? Under what circumstances?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally what kind of grievances arise between the employee and employer, or manager?</li> <li>At what point in a dispute do employees contact you?</li> <li>In your experience what do they do before or instead of contacting you?</li> <li>Would you consider going on strike? Under what circumstances?</li> </ul>	
Tracer Issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is your view of the Lab Modernisation strategy?</li> <li>Will this strategy have implications at HR level?</li> <li>How have you responded to changes under this strategy?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is your view of the Lab Modernisation strategy? Will this strategy have implications for your role?</li> <li>How have you responded to changes under the Lab</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you feel about the Lab Reconfiguration strategy?</li> <li>How have you, or your colleagues, responded to these changes?</li> <li>Are there any specific areas of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you feel about the changes under the Lab Reconfiguration strategy?</li> <li>How have you, or those you represent responded to these changes?</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you experience / do you envisage any problems? Have you taken any steps to address these problems?</li> <li>• How do you plan to address any conflict arising with this strategy?</li> <li>• How have employees responded to these changes?</li> <li>• Do employees have any grievances or concerns with regard to these changes?</li> <li>• How have employees influenced or tried to influence the implementation of these changes? Can you give me an example?</li> </ul>	<p>Reconfiguration strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you / do you envisage any problems? Have you taken any steps to address these problems?</li> <li>• How have your subordinates responded to these changes? Do your subordinates have any grievances or concerns?</li> <li>• How have your subordinates influenced or tried to influence the implementation of these changes? or any other workplace changes? Can you give me an example?</li> <li>• Can you give me an example of how you attempted to influence the implementation of a change in the workplace? To reduce potential conflict?</li> </ul>	<p>the planned changes that are a concern or cause of discontent with you, or your colleagues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have you or your colleagues tried to influence the implementation of these changes? Do you plan to?</li> <li>• Can you give me an example of how you tried to influence the implementation of any change in the workplace?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you or those you represent have grievances with your employer or manager with regard to these changes?</li> <li>• How have you or those you represent tried to influence the implementation of these changes?</li> <li>• Can you give me an example of how you or those you represent attempted to influence the implementation of any change in the workplace?</li> </ul>
Hindsight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you could change something you did - or did not do - relating to conflict in the employment relationship or the workplace - what would it be? Why?</li> </ul>			



Figure 4.6: Pattern of Interview Schedule Design



Reflecting the research objective to investigate workplace IR conflict and the philosophical stance on the value of the human experiences, the case interviews focused on participant experiences of IR conflict. Participants were asked to provide examples which were explored further using probing questions (see Figure 4.7). This approach was informed by the critical incident technique which allows interviewees to describe and reflect on a selected incident or experience. Chell (2004) states:

“a qualitative interview procedure, which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes or issues), identified by the respondent, the way they are managed and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain an understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective and behavioural elements”.

This approach was repeated first in a general context and then with specific reference to the LMRS. Drawing on the critical incident technique allowed data collection to focus on the individual’s experience of IR conflict which was consistent with the study's underpinning in phenomenology. In addition, the critical incident technique is familiar to the clinical setting (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2008) and was therefore, in line with ethical practice (Section 4.11), sensitive to the needs and expectations of participants. This in turn allowed the researcher to get closer to the phenomenon under investigation.

Figure 4.7: Sample probing questions in the Critical Interview Technique

- What happened next?
- Why did it happen?
- What did the parties concerned feel?
- What were the consequences - immediately/long term?
- How did you [respondent] cope?
- What tactics were used?

Adapted from Chell (2004) in Cassell & Symon (2004:49).

The interview schedule was also informed by Smith and Osborn (2007) who noted the use of funnelling as a technique where broad questions are posed at the beginning before more focused, detailed questions.

The main challenge of the interviews was to use language that would facilitate meaningful data collection. The term 'industrial relations conflict' could not be used in the questions for two reasons: (i) many participants would not be familiar with the term, or understand its meaning, and (ii) those who have an understanding of the term may have preconceived ideas as to what IR conflict entails which would restrict the lines of enquiry and undermine the research objective. Thus, language such as grievance, discontent and dissatisfaction in the employment relationship was used.

It was also recognised that the issue of IR conflict is a potentially sensitive and emotive issue (Section 4.11). Other issues that emerged related to delays and cancellations by participants, particularly those from a high level managerial or clinician background. However, this was addressed by (i) planning for unplanned scheduling changes with the inclusion of additional time between interviews and days spent on site, and (ii) the use of delays for other forms of data collection such as observation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to enable the identification of emergent themes facilitated by NVivo. Owing to the strengths and weaknesses of any one data source and the value of multiple sources, the interview data was triangulated with documentation and observation. Table 4.4 illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of these three sources.

#### Observation

The researcher pursued an informal observation in each organisation which was facilitated by participant-related delays for interviews, and the use of introduction meetings where possible. In each case interviews were scheduled over three to five consecutive days. In addition, the

researcher returned to each of the sites on a number of occasions to meet interviewees unavailable during the initial visit. This allowed for further observation of the workplace.

Table 4.4: Data: Advantages and Disadvantages

Data Collection	Advantages	Disadvantages
Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted</li> <li>• Insightful - provides perceived causal inferences and explanations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bias due to poorly articulated questions</li> <li>• Response bias</li> <li>• Inaccuracies due to poor recall</li> <li>• Reflexivity - interviewees answering to please the researcher</li> </ul>
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality covers events in real time</li> <li>• Contextual - gathers data on the context of a case</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-consuming</li> <li>• Selectivity due to time required, and difficulty in achieving broad coverage</li> <li>• Reflexivity - observation may impact on events</li> <li>• Cost</li> </ul>
Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stable - can be reviewed repeatedly</li> <li>• Unobtrusive - not created as the result of a case study</li> <li>• Exact</li> <li>• Broad coverage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irretrievability</li> <li>• Biased selectivity</li> <li>• Reporting bias of unknown author</li> <li>• Access - may be withheld</li> </ul>

Adapted from Yin (2009:102)

#### Document and Archival

"Except for studies of preliterate societies, documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study topic" (Yin, 2009:101).

The researcher used internal and external documentary information for each of the four case studies. This included policy documents, along with hospital strategy and annual reports. In addition, HSE and Department of Health and Children (DOHC) strategy documents were used in conjunction with documentation relating to the LMRS. As with all data sources, documentary information poses limitations specifically related to access and author perspective. Thus it is important, in terms of MST to be cognisant that HSE documents, for example, are primarily from the perspective of the employer. This was counterbalanced by utilising documentary information from relevant union organisations. While there are weaknesses associated with each data source, the use of multiple sources of data provided significant value in this regard. This is discussed overleaf.

## Triangulation and the Value of Multiple Data Sources

Merriam (2002) explains that multiple sources enhance the validity of findings. Yin (2009:117) concurs, arguing that it is (i) a key advantage of the case study method, and (ii) allows for "converging lines of enquiry" and data triangulation. Data triangulation embeds findings in a number of different sources, and in a sense is akin to having a number of 'witnesses' to bolster the credibility of findings.

Table 4.5: Cases and Data Sources

Data Source	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Interviews	12	12	8	10
Documents	Annual Reports Labour Court Case Data Union Publications Media Health Stat DOHC and HSE Reports LMRS Documents			
Observation	5 Visits	7 Visits	5 Visits	4 Visits

## 4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

"The question of epistemology is usually determined when a research project is being conceptualised, although epistemology may also raise its head again during analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:14).

The quote above illustrates that Edmondson and McManus's (2007) concept of research fit extends throughout scholarly study from question and method to data analysis, and how each element must in turn be consistent with the philosophical perspective employed. Thus the philosophical of this study is restated: 'basic interpretive qualitative research' (Merriam, 2002) combining symbolic interactionism, and phenomenology.

The research has adopted thematic analysis with an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) orientation. Thematic analysis (TA) involves identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes of data, often moving toward interpretation of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). IPA aims to understand the experience of individuals and the meaning they attach to their particular experiences which involves a multi-staged process of identifying and clustering themes across each individual transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Table 4.6 Comparing Thematic analysis and IPA

Stage in Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis	IPA
1	Familiarize yourself with dataset noting initial comments/ideas	Read single transcript noting initial comments/ideas
2	Generate initial codes, systematically coding whole data set	Generate initial themes from first transcript
3	Search for themes	Generate initial list of themes
4	Review themes	Cluster themes
5	Refine themes	Create a list or table of themes and sub themes
6.	-	Repeat process with next transcript until all transcripts have been analysed
7	-	Create a final list or table of themes and sub themes.

Adapted from Silverman (2011:274-275).

Reflective of the composite philosophical stance adopted, it was thought that the most appropriate approach to data analysis was one that integrated the tenets of thematic analysis and IPA. It can be seen from Table 4.6 that the guidelines for thematic analysis and IPA are broadly similar, indicating that these approaches are consistent. The main difference between these methods relates to their philosophical roots. While thematic analysis is applicable to several epistemological and ontological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), IPA is wed to phenomenology (Silverman, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Thus thematic analysis, which can be used with several philosophical perspectives including symbolic interactionism, was selected. However, it is important to be clear about the perspective guiding analysis:

"it is important that the theoretical position of thematic analysis is made clear, as this is all too often left unspoken... Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of data, what they represent in terms of 'the world', 'reality' and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:9).

Another key difference is that thematic analysis recommends coding the whole data set before clustering themes, while IPA advocates the coding of a single transcript and clustering of themes after each one which necessitates a relatively small data set (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This study adopted an intermediate view and coded data on a case-by-case basis, clustering themes accordingly. This intermediate approach is consistent with the embedded case design and workplace level of analysis. Further, it facilitated cross-case comparison in line with Eisenhardt's (1989) approach to theory-building.

A further rationale for using thematic analysis is its consistency with integrated data analysis where both inductive and deductive approaches, as advocated by Yin (2003a) and Pettigrew (1997), are employed. While IPA emphasises a dynamic role for the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2007), it is thought that a pure form of IPA, due to the focus on 'bracketing' or epoche which requires the researcher to suspend presuppositions derived from his or her experience and that derived from "authoritative sources" (Ashworth, 1999 cited in Merriam, 2002), is more closely aligned to inductive analysis. In contrast thematic analysis is consistent with integrated data analysis (see Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This approach allowed the research to draw on existing literature by using *a priori* constructs in the coding scheme while allowing insights to emerge directly from the data. Table 4.7 outlines the advantages and disadvantages associated with thematic analysis, and how in turn the disadvantages were managed within the study.

Table 4.7: Advantages and Disadvantages of Thematic Analysis

Advantages	Disadvantages	Managing Disadvantages
More accessible to novice researchers due to flexibility	Steps taken in extant research can be vague and therefore inaccessible to novice researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of steps outlined in Fereday &amp; Muir-Cochrane (2006); Silverman (2011)</li> <li>• Use of Labour Court Review in Research Strategy (Section 4.6) to develop analysis skills</li> </ul>
Consistent with a variety of philosophical approaches	If philosophical perspective is unclear, analysis may be inconsistent with study objectives	Clear statement of philosophical stance at outset, and as it relates to data analysis
-	Data Familiarity is key to useful insights and strong analysis	Data collection and analysis are conducted by same researcher
Consistent with inductive and deductive approaches	-	-

Attention now turns to the practicalities of data analysis, beginning with a discussion of NVivo software followed by a more in depth discussion of how thematic analysis was applied in this research project.

#### SOFTWARE AS A DATA ANALYSIS TOOL

The decision to use NVivo is a key methodological decision and skill for this project. The rationale was based on (i) NVivo is a common practice in qualitative research (Atherton & Elsmore, 2007), (ii) it facilitates the management of large quantities of qualitative data, and (iii) seamless management of research analysis. Key advantages noted in the use of the software in this project

were the ease of data retrieval and data replication. The latter was used in two ways in the study. First, if a segment of data pertained to more than one code, the NVivo system could 'replicate' the data without the practical difficulties associated with hard copy data analysis. Second, in order to facilitate the construction of a chain of evidence, data was replicated within folders to retain a working record of analysis at different intervals. This process, illustrated in Appendix 3, also facilitated iterative review between stages of analysis. This and other functions of this software used in this study are outlined in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Functions of Qualitative Data Analysis Software and Application in this Project

Function	Application
Coding	Used for line-by-line analysis of case data in inductive, deductive, and integrative phases of analysis
Memoing/Annotation	Descriptions were attached to each code
Search & Retrieval	Word-clouds were used to facilitate reflection
Structuring of Codes and Themes	Used to create linkages between constructs, and to facilitate theory development and data reduction
Data replication	Used to create a chain of evidence, and records of analysis

Adapted from Miles & Huberman (1994:312-313)

While the benefits of using data analysis software are significant, there are disadvantages and inherent risks which must be acknowledged and managed. Firstly, there must be clarity around the role of the software and that of the researcher. There is often a perception that NVivo or other similar packages "do the data analysis" (Weitzman, 2000). It must be recognised that the software is merely a tool used to facilitate analysis, and that the responsibility for a credible and rigorous analysis lies entirely with the researcher. In the same vein, the researcher must recognise that the different functions of the software may - or may not - be consistent with the research at hand, or the philosophical stance adopted. Therefore, as with all methodological decisions, the researcher must ensure 'fit' or consistency between the approaches employed. Disadvantages of the software and its management is presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Managing the Disadvantages of Qualitative Data Analysis Software

Disadvantage	Management Strategy
Data Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloud Storage</li> <li>• External Hard drive</li> </ul>
Distance between researcher & data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital age researcher</li> <li>• Repeated reading of data for immersion required for thematic analysis</li> <li>• Data collection conducted by researcher leading to high familiarity</li> </ul>
Learning Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice with Labour Court review - smaller data set</li> <li>• Training - October 2012 &amp; March 2013</li> <li>• Remote support from trainer</li> <li>• Reasonably intuitive due to connection with MS Word</li> </ul>

The software, while somewhat tedious, improved the efficiency of data analysis and was helpful in managing the large data set. In short, NVivo supported the data analysis strategy discussed further in the ensuing section.

#### DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGY

As stated, the research adopted an integrated approach to data analysis using a hybrid of qualitative methods of thematic analysis: the data-driven inductive approach of Boyatzis (1998), and the deductive theory-driven approach involving the use of *a priori* codes as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). A similar approach was adopted by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006:83) who explain that the value in integrating these methods was to allow the study to draw on the tenets of the subject matter, and allow for themes to emerge "direct from the data". This facilitated the broader exploration of IR conflict by allowing themes to emerge, whilst still drawing on our extant understanding of IR conflict, and as such contributed to theory development in the project. Both phases were subjected to searches for confirming and disconfirming data.

Drawing on thematic analysis with an IPA orientation data analysis was undertaken on a case-by-case basis to facilitate cross-case comparison (Eisenhardt, 1989) and reflect the unit of analysis. Within-case analysis required three iterative phases of examination. Firstly, an inductive review of the data to allow for emergent codes was conducted. This involved three sub-steps: (a) open-coding; (b) cross-coding and coding-on whereby each code was reviewed in the context of the other identified codes and broken down further into sub-codes; and (c) clustering, integration and review. Open coding is common to thematic analysis and IPA where both approaches require the researcher to 'actively' read the data set or part of the data set, making comments on the content for later reflection (Silverman, 2011). Smith and Osborn (2007:67) note, from an IPA perspective, that this phase "is close to being free textual analysis". Similarly Braun and Clarke (2006:16), writing from a thematic analysis approach, state:

"[i]mmersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, and reading the data in an *active* way - searching for meanings, patterns and so on. It is ideal to read through the entire data set at least once before you begin your coding, as your ideas, identification of possible patterns will be shaped as you read".

The second phase involved exploring deductive codes and the use of *a priori* constructs derived from existing literature. Again, this required three sub-steps: (a) application of start list; (b) cross-coding and coding-on; and (c) clustering, integration and review. This phase first and foremost required the development of a code manual (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) or start list (Miles & Huberman, 1994) where *a priori* constructs were identified.



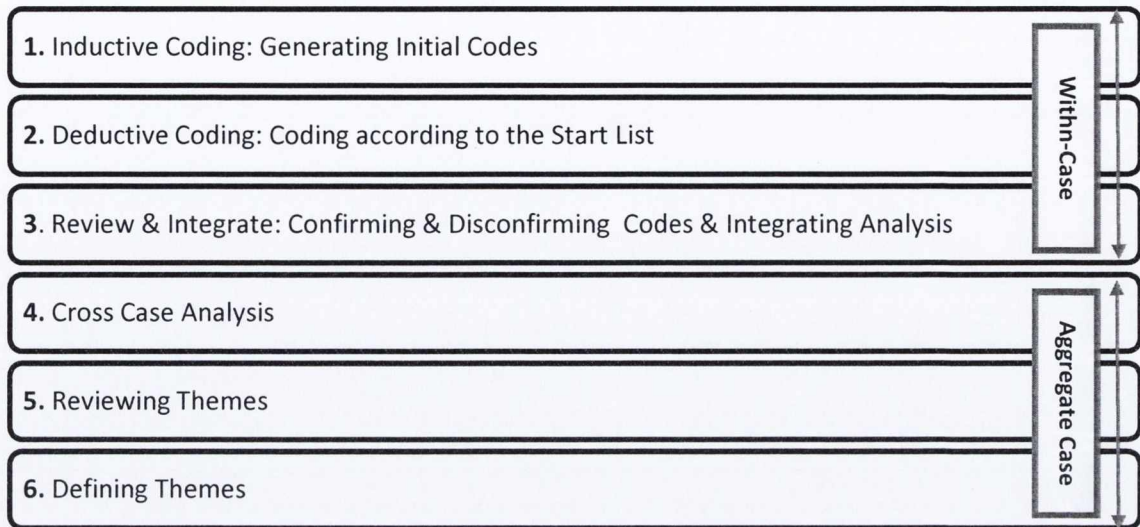
Phase 3, as the final phase of within-case analysis, involved reviewing the codes from phases one and two with their associated data, and clustering codes into themes. These phases, informed by Rapley (2011 cited in Silverman, 2011), Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), Braun and Clarke (2006) and Smith and Osborn (2007), were repeated across all four cases and then subjected to cross-case comparison, final revision and definition of aggregate themes.

Cross-case comparison involved searching for differences across the four case sites, paying particular attention to the comparative dimensions selected: hospital type and strategy direction. This approach, informed by Eisenhardt (1989), allowed differences to emerge at case level before patterns were sought across cases, providing greater 'fit' between the data and the findings. Following comparative analysis, the study moved toward pattern-matching across the four cases where aggregate themes were identified. The identification of themes adopted a broader focus, moving from small units of analysis with individual codes to encapsulating themes in the data. This required the compilation of related codes into an overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and sub-themes. In line with Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Gioia *et al.* (2012) tables and ts demonstrate thematic derivation and data 'fit'. In line with the focus of thematic analysis on linking examples to themes (Howitt & Cramer, 2010), excerpts from the data are linked to sub-themes, or codes, which are in turn linked to overarching themes. This also facilitates educational authenticity and promotes dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Phase 5 involved reviewing the identified themes to assess the fit between theme and data. This process called for a consideration of the appropriateness of the themes and their linkages to establish whether the analysis was reflective of the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase 6 required themes to be named and defined, inclusive of the relationships between each, with a specific focus on how they pertained to the research questions posed. This is reflective of IPA which focuses on the creation of a 'final list' or hierarchy of themes and sub-themes (Rapley, 2011 in Silverman, 2011). While presented in a sequential format in Figure 4.8 it should be noted that these were iterative cycles of analysis where phases interacted, and drew heavily on periods of reflection. This is noted by Braun & Clarke (2006:17):

"In essence, coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire process"

Figure 4.8: Phases in Thematic Analysis



Adapted from Fereday & Muir-Chochrane, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006.

*Coding Scheme*

The coding manual (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) or 'start list' (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of *a priori* constructs was derived from extant literature and codes emerging from the Labour Court review (Appendix 4). A definition or 'rule for inclusion' is provided along with a description of the code where necessary.

**4.9 THEORY BUILDING FROM CASE STUDIES**

The approach to theory-building adopted in this research is largely consistent with Eisenhardt (1989) who, while focused on inductive analysis, incorporates deductive elements. Specifically she identifies the use of a guiding research question and *a priori* constructs in case study design. However, the clear distinction between the positivist approach of Eisenhardt (1989) and this research is the underlying interpretivist stance. As such, the generation of testable hypotheses and generalisable theories was not the objective of this study.

Despite these differences in epistemology and ontology, the approach to theory-building was reflective of Eisenhardt (1989; 1991) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) where emphasis was placed in iterative cycles between data, emergent theory, and extant theory. Recommendations regarding the use of multiple comparative cases and replication logic (Eisenhardt, 1991) to improve transferability (as an alternative to generalisability) were adhered to, alongside the use

of a case study protocol which is also recommended by Yin (2009). In this regard the findings of the research are more credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by ruling out the role of idiosyncrasies of one organisation (Eisenhardt & Graeber, 2007), where multiple sources also signals credibility.

As noted by Eisenhardt (1989), central to theory-building is the data analysis strategy. In this regard, the researcher sought to explicate the 'chasm' between methods and conclusions, placing emphasis on 'fit' with the data. In doing so, the data analysis strategy was consistent with the comparative approach recommended by Eisenhardt (1989), and specifically the use of within-case analysis before cross-case and aggregate analysis. This approach "allows the unique patterns of each case to emerge before investigators push to generalize [transfer] across cases" (Eisenhardt, 1989:540). Further, it contributed to 'fairness' as an indicator of research authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

In addition to recommendations on case selection, case protocols, and data analysis, the approach to theory-building drew on Eisenhardt's (1989) 'enfolding literature' step. In the findings chapters that follow, key links to and departures from existing literature are identified to reflect this use of existing literature in the process of theory development. However the main focus of these chapters is the lived experience of participants. The relationship between findings and literature is explored further in Chapter 8 where literature is enfolded and contributions are delineated. The work draws on Eisenhardt and Graebner's (2007) recommendations on the tabular and graphical presentation of qualitative data.

#### **4.10 EVALUATING RESEARCH DESIGN**

"No research paradigm has a monopoly on quality. None can deliver promising outcomes with certainty. None have the grounds for saying "this is it" about their designs, procedures, and anticipated outcomes... Many types of good results are the fruits of qualitative research. Its generative potential is immense" (Peshkin, 1993:28).

The qualitative case study method has been critiqued with some considering the method as lacking generalisability, validity, reliability and rigour (Yin, 2009). However, these conventional metrics of research quality, rooted in the positivist and quantitative tradition, are not altogether suitable for the evaluation of interpretive enquiries (Golafshani, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994:2) note that the "standards for the 'goodness' of qualitative findings may well differ from traditional ones". While the metrics of evaluation may differ, that does not overshadow the need for evaluation itself. Miles and Huberman (1994:2 citing Miles, 1979b) write:

"The most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that the methods of analysis are not well formulated. For quantitative data, there are clear conventions the researcher can use. But the analyst faced with a bank of qualitative data has very few

guidelines for protection against self-delusion, let alone the presentation of unreliable or invalid conclusions to scientific or policy-making audiences".

In this regard, philosophy and its central role in establishing 'fit' throughout a study emerges once again. While some authors writing from phenomenological perspectives argue that, based on the absence of an independent reality, there is no need to account for the validity or otherwise of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), this research has adopted a more nuanced view of evaluation. It seems intuitive - once articulated - that research, guided by a particular philosophical stance, ought to be evaluated using criteria, or an interpretation of criteria, sensitive to its philosophical underpinnings. Issues such as the nature of reality, ontology, and the nature of knowledge, epistemology, which mould research should surely influence our evaluation of research quality. Thus, as in areas of method selection and data analysis, evaluation criteria consistent with the philosophical stance are employed.

#### RIGOUR

Rigour or robustness of research is conventionally assessed with reference to generalisability, validity and reliability. However, in line with the above, Lincoln and Guba (1985) present alternative criteria which - related to these metrics - are more suitable for the evaluation of subjectivist enquiry. As illustrated in Table 4.10, these metrics, transferability, credibility, and reliability are now explored and used to assess the quality of this research design. This section also considers the use of Guba and Lincoln's (1994) second form of rigour with regard to criteria on the authenticity of research.

Table 4.10: Research Evaluation Criteria

Positivist Evaluation Criteria	Interpretivist Evaluation Criterion	Application
External Validity / Generalisability	Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replication Logic was employed to improve transferability of findings</li> <li>• Transferability still requires caution due to a single national context, industry context, and one workplace within a pluralist setting</li> </ul>
Internal Validity	Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use 'fairness' approach</li> <li>• Competing accounts</li> <li>• Pattern-matching</li> </ul>
Construct Validity	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational definition</li> <li>• Compilation IR conflict definition based on IR and organisational literatures</li> <li>• Multiple Data Sources</li> <li>• Chains of Evidence / Data Structure</li> <li>• Use of pilot study to refine data collection instrument</li> </ul>
Reliability	Dependability	In line with Yin (2009) a case study protocol was used to facilitate consistency with a multiple case study design

Adapted from Yin (2009); Lincoln & Guba (1985); Guba & Lincoln (1994); Rosenthal & Rosnow (1991)

### Transferability

Yin (2009:43) explains that a key test for the quality of research and research design centres on defining the extent to which findings are generalisable to a theory applicable in other contexts. Formulation of general laws is not the objective of interpretivist research which places greater emphasis on social interaction and constructed meaning. Thus, the interpretivist enquiry seeks to make claims regarding the case or set of cases where context, time, or human experiences are influencing factors. This role of context is referenced by Yin (2009:18) in defining the case study method where a key advantage of the approach lies in its suitability for investigations where "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". While some authors argue that generalisable outcomes are not best served by the case study method (Dooley, 2002), this author adopts the position that the case study method is flexible in its application. Therefore it can be used to provide generalisable theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) *if* this is the objective of the study, it is designed accordingly. Thus, fit between objective and method is central to the issue of generalisable findings: "some [authors] even try to claim that they have a 'representative sample'. To me, that is a mismatch of method and goals: to say something representative, you need to pick a different methodology" (Siggelkow, 2007:20). Owing to philosophical divergences, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the use of transferability as an alternative metric for evaluating constructivist enquiry and its relevance for other contexts. In many regards defining the scope or

relevance of findings signals an understanding of the research design, its context, and avoids unsubstantiated claims. Though transferability of findings in this research project was improved by the multiple and comparative case design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009), the study was conducted in a single national and industry context where the embedded units were a single type of workplace setting within a notably pluralist context. As such transferability of findings requires caution.

### **Credibility**

Credibility, paralleled with internal validity or the correctness of causal relationships, is also a substitute for 'truth value' in naturalistic enquiry (Seale, 2002 citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interpretivism and specifically the phenomenological perspective employed places value on participant interpretation of their experiences. Within this perspective, 'truth' is largely determined by participants themselves. Thus emphasis was placed on fit between the data and findings. Lincoln & Guba (1985) assert that credibility should replace 'truth value' where credibility is improved with triangulation of data sources and, in line with multiple stakeholder theory, the use of diverging views from different participants. Further to this, the study has drawn on 'critical colleagues' where dissenting views were obtained throughout the research. In this regard presentations of analysis and earlier drafts of the work within the faculty and at conference proceedings proved useful.

### **Dependability**

Closely related to the issue of generalisability, reliability in the conventional approach refers to the replicability of results (Yin, 2009). As discussed, generalisability is not a central objective of interpretivist enquiry or the study at hand. Further, replication of results is likely influenced by the time, setting and specific research participants. This is particularly true in an interpretivist study drawing on phenomenology and its emphasis on the experiences and interpretations of the research participants themselves. Dependability can be used to assess whether the researcher has conducted a consistent investigation (Golafshani, 2003). In this regard a case study protocol was formulated in line with Yin (2009) and Eisenhardt (1989). Further, drawing on Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Gioia (2012), the findings use tables and data structures to demonstrate connections between data, codes, and aggregate themes. Similarly, NVivo was used to replicate data so that stages of individual analysis could be preserved (see Appendix 3). This approach, similar to Yin's (2009) use of 'chains of evidence', attempts to elucidate the steps taken in the study with a view to facilitating the evaluation and interrogation of its quality. Essentially, the study has sought to avoid the ambiguity that Miles and Huberman (1994:2) describe:

"We do not really see how the researcher got from 3,600 pages of field notes to the final conclusions, as sprinkled with vivid illustrations as they may be".

### **'The Second Kind of Rigour' Validity as Authenticity**

While useful in moving beyond conventional indicators of rigour, Guba and Lincoln (1994:114) note that the parallelism of transferability, credibility and dependability "to positivist criteria makes them suspect". As such, other indicators of rigour for qualitative constructivist research are identified in reference to authenticity. In this regard, the research has aimed to be 'interpretively rigorous' where Guba and Lincoln (1994) place emphasis on defensible reasoning and community consent. This study has pursued 'fit' (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) as a form of defensible reasoning.

In terms of community consent, while the research design departs from the 'conventional approach' in IR conflict studies (Godard, 2011) this is justified by the research objective and questions posed. The methods chosen are also commonly employed in healthcare research and related domains of work investigation, such as HR and OB.

Indicators of authenticity are identified as fairness, ontological authenticity and educational authenticity, along with catalytic and tactical authenticity which focus on motivating and empowering action<sup>35</sup>. Fairness, or a balanced presentation of confirming and disconfirming viewpoints, has been incorporated into the study through the use of multiple stakeholder theory and the theoretical emphasis on pluralism. As such, competing accounts and interpretations have been included in the findings. Yin (2009:187), in describing an exemplary case study, also identifies value in the consideration of alternative perspectives.

Ontological authenticity centres on improving personal constructions where research design fulfils research objective and answers research questions, while educational authenticity - related to community consent - leads to an improved understanding of the constructions of others (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The evaluation of research quality is therefore related to the acceptance of knowledge claims and persuasion of the intended audience. In this regard the research must first be clear about the community to which it intends to contribute. Secondly, the research - as with the dependability criterion - must be explicit about the steps taken in the research process and provide sufficient evidence. This is reminiscent of Yin (2009:188) who notes the importance of providing readers with sufficient data so that they too can interpret and be persuaded within

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<sup>35</sup> Though the findings may be useful for practice, the study makes no claim of a contribution to practice. As such issues of catalytic and tactical authenticity are not explored here.

themselves that the conclusions and formulated theory are reflective of the data collected. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) concur.

Many authors (Eisenhardt, 1989; Peshkin, 1993; Whetton, 1989), in discussing the evaluation of qualitative research aimed at building or developing theory, assert that true evaluation centres on the outcomes of qualitative research and the quality of theory produced. Peshkin (1993:23) writes:

"The proof of research conducted by whatever means resides in the pudding of its outcomes. In search of puddings I dug into the large and growing literature of qualitative studies".

In this regard, the hallmark of a rigorous study is the use of research methods that are fit for purpose and meet research objectives by answering the questions posed and delivering the intended contribution. Thus, in assessing the quality of research design we can assess the quality of its output: the theory. The next section will examine the ethical considerations of this research and how these were managed.

#### **4.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research operated within the domain of the social sciences and as such the core ethical issue is the protection of human subjects (Sproull, 1995). Berg notes (2009:60):

"Social scientists, perhaps to a greater extent than the average citizen, have an ethical obligation to their colleagues, their study population, and the larger society. The reason for this is that social scientists delve into the social lives of other human beings".

In line with this view, the researcher sought ethical approval in the first instance within the host institution, Trinity College Dublin. A successful application, and response to questions, was made to the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Business (see Appendix 5). Further approval was sought at various points during data collection. Though not publicised, or referenced by any participants, it was discovered mid-data collection in the third case that a sub-division of the HSE required their own ethical approval process. A lengthy application, largely focused on medical research, was completed and a certificate of professional liability insurance was supplied upon request. Despite significant delays to data collection, retrospective approval was granted. A redacted letter of approval is presented in Appendix 6. The following section considers three central tenets of research ethics: harm, consent, and confidentiality and anonymity - and how they were managed in this study.



## HARM

The potential harm caused by the study is limited to non-serious and transient upset. It was expected that some interview participants may become upset in describing a particular experience of conflict in the employment relationship. In this context it is not the interview that causes the upset but rather the event being discussed. It was decided, in advance of data collection, that should a participant become upset during the interview they would be given the opportunity to (i) withdraw or (ii) take a break. In order to mitigate against dissonance following the interview, participants were informed of their right of withdrawal along with the researcher's contact information. Two notable instances emerged in this regard. One interviewee became quite upset during the interview but chose to proceed. Another explained that the interview and opportunity to discuss their experiences of IR conflict provided them with cathartic value.

The interviewing process was informed by piloted design and expert interviews. This helped to minimise risk for participants by ensuring questions were: (i) fit to meet the objectives of the research<sup>36</sup>; (ii) understood by participants; and (iii) non-threatening. A key challenge of the interviews is to use language that would facilitate meaningful data collection. The term industrial relations conflict could not be used in the questions.

It was also recognised that the issue of IR conflict, for some, is sensitive. Thus, in line with Yin (2003) it was important to use *non-threatening* questions yet answer the guiding questions of the study. This was addressed by using 'how' questions where possible as advocated by Yin (2003). This issue was also mitigated by establishing a rapport with the participant by discussing how they were protected in the study prior to the commencement of the interview via written/phone contact (where applicable), and an introduction meeting (where applicable). Building rapport was also facilitated within the setting of the interview location where a table, aimed at promoting natural conversation, was chosen, rather than a desk which has power related connotations. General questions about the interviewee's role were also used as an 'ice breaker'.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

In line with the 'gatekeeper' tactic, the Laboratory Manager in each case recruited and selected participants based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

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<sup>36</sup> It is thought, in line with Berg (2009), that poorly designed research - unlikely to meet research objectives - is unethical by wasting the participant's time.

## Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria, presented alongside exclusion criteria in Table 4.11, were determined by the research question and research design. Due to the focus on the workplace, the inclusion criteria related to working age and employment status. In line with the use of the LMRS as the tracer issue, participants were selected based on their role in, or connection to, the Laboratory setting. Further, due to the IR focus and pluralist perspective, union representatives were also included. Vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, may have been included in the study, however these groups were *not* the target population and their status within these groups was not of interest to the study.

Table 4.11: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Interview Participants

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Adults of working age	Employees aged 16-18 were excluded due to the ill-defined issue of consent with this group staff
Laboratory Staff, union representatives, HR/IR staff	

Risk of harm at the workplace or hospital level is based on the collection of sensitive information. In this regard harm was addressed using hospital and regional anonymity along with security measures for data storage.

## CONSENT

Emerging in the Nuremberg Code (1947) it is required that participants engage in research voluntarily (Hazlehurst, 2008). This issue faces greater complexity when the notion of informed consent is considered. The matter of consent was addressed with a number of management strategies including: (i) a consent form, (ii) a delay between information provision and consent of 6-8 weeks, (iii) a two-stage consent process, and (iv) the use of translations where necessary.

In each site the 'gatekeeper' method of gaining access was employed in order to protect the privacy of staff and facilitate the right of refusal. The research and the researcher were first introduced to Laboratory Managers by the Assistant National Director charged with LMRS. Laboratory Managers acted in turn as 'gate keepers'. The materials supplied included a letter of ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee in Trinity College, a list of protocols to protect participants, an information letter and consent agreement for participants, and a confidentiality agreement to be signed by the researcher for the organisation and each individual participant.

## **Informed Consent**

A participant pack was provided for all individuals involved in the study and each case site. This pack included the information letter and consent agreement, a letter of ethical approval from the REC in Trinity College, a list of ethical protections for participants, and a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 7) signed by the researcher. Consent was given in two stages: firstly in person or via email to the Lab Manager. The second stage was then obtained before the interview by the researcher. The documents listed were provided again, including a verbal explanation about the research and what was involved for the participants. Crucially, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw and confidentiality were emphasised.

This two-staged consent process allowed for a 6-8 week delay between information and stage two consent. This facilitated a review of the information sheets and requests for further information. While the study was considered low risk to participants, this allowed for a period of reflection and consultation with colleagues, friends and family. In one instance a prospective participant, feeling nervous following consultation with their partner, withdrew after stage one consent but before stage two. The researcher holds no position in the organisations and as such no dependent relationship existed between researcher and participant that might undermine voluntary consent.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

Research participants have the right to have data pertaining to them protected (Sproull, 1995). In addition, the participant has the right to privacy. This research employed a number of management strategies to guarantee confidentiality. It also took measures to protect anonymity. However, given the nature of face-to-face interviews complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. The aim in this instance is to protect confidentiality and provide anonymity beyond the researcher.

## **Confidentiality**

The data has gone through two stages of classification. Due to the presence of the researcher, interview data is not entirely anonymous. As such, data was pseudonymised. However, for the purposes of maintaining the right of the participant to withdraw, the data was coded where access to the code is confined to the researcher. The identity of all participants has been kept confidential. No material refers to the name of the participant or cases. Further, recordings of interviews contained no reference to the identity of the participant or case. This separated the data from the identity of the participant to safeguard confidentiality. Case overviews, including

the number of participants per case, are separated from cited data where participants are referred to by position descriptor and case pseudonym. This protects participants from in-case identification where the numbers of participants varied between sites.

As stated, the researcher signed a confidentiality agreement for all participants. In addition, the following strategies were adopted to further protect confidentiality:

1. Data Management Systems: Sensitive documents/data were stored on device with fingerprint and password encrypted systems.
2. Thesis Hold: The researcher has applied for a 'thesis hold' to further protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

#### Role Anonymity

The issue of role anonymity arises where participants are potentially identifiable due to seniority. This issue is somewhat magnified in Ireland due to its size, however, it can be identified globally. This issue arose in the research with respect to participants in senior laboratory and HR/IR positions. It was addressed with the following strategies:

1. Hospital Anonymity: Each of the hospitals in the study remained confidential and was referred to only by (i) pseudonym and (ii) hospital type. The tracer issue is applicable to all public hospitals in Ireland, thus increasing the potential pool of participants and protecting anonymity.
2. Regional Anonymity: The Irish hospital system is organised into four regions: HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster, HSE Dublin North East, HSE South, and HSE West. Within certain regions a 'hub' lab would be readily identifiable and therefore impinge on the anonymity of participants from each site. To avoid this, the study employed regional anonymity.
3. Gender Anonymity: Gender references were common throughout the data. Arising from this feature in the data, and in order to protect the identity of participants in more enumerated positions, all gender references have been removed from reported data.

#### 4.12 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Chapter was to present the research methodology, taken here as the philosophical perspective which guides investigation, and the research methods as the practical steps taken to conduct the investigation. Interwoven in this chapter has been a discussion of research design and how the elements drive toward the overarching goal: the research problem.

Determined by the research objective to explore the nature or 'essence' of workplace IR conflict in terms of its expressions and impact, the study design adopted a qualitative approach where reality is a subjectivist experience. In line with these objectives, the philosophical perspective adopted conformed to what Merriam (2002) terms 'basic interpretive research' and tenets of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. These approaches, though consistent with the researcher's world view, are well-suited for the demands of the investigation. Multiple stakeholder theory was also used to guide methodological decisions.

Situated in the complex, unionised and 'conflict prone' healthcare setting, a tracer issue was selected based on a review of Labour Court recommendations. The healthcare setting and tracer issue were selected in line with Yin's (2009) recommendations regarding cases of public interest and national importance. A case study method was adopted where the design, informed by Eisenhardt (1989), and the objective of theory development was comparative and embedded. Following on from these choices the data analysis was integrative, allowing the study to draw on existing literature and insights emerging directly from the data. Thematic analysis was used due to its consistency with this approach, and the philosophical perspective guiding the study.

"The search for justification often carries us farther and farther from the heart of morality" (Peshkin citing Noddings, 1993:23).

It was noted at the outset that methodology is not about morals, or good methods versus bad, but rather the use of effective methods in meeting a goal. In this chapter the author sought to *justify* the series of decisions taken, elucidating the appropriateness of the research design for the research objective and the questions which underpin it. While making justifications explicit is a valuable and necessary activity of all researchers – none more so than the doctoral researcher – it is also possible, adopting a less defensive and more jubilant standpoint, to consider the 'promise' of qualitative research. Citing Noddings, Peshkin (1993:23) explains that the 'heart of morality' in this regard is rooted in "respecting - not defending - the integrity of the qualitative paradigm and that this respect does not derive from taking as one's starting point the issues and premises as defined by nonqualitative proponents".

At this juncture the research objective and questions have been posed and expounded, while the approach and methods employed have been presented in this chapter. Thus attention turns now to the findings of the study which are presented in Chapters 6 and 7. However, in order to situate the findings in their empirical context, Chapter 5 first presents a discussion of the Medlab setting. Specifically this Chapter will provide an overview of the tracer issue selected for this study: the Laboratory Reconfiguration and Modernisation Strategy.

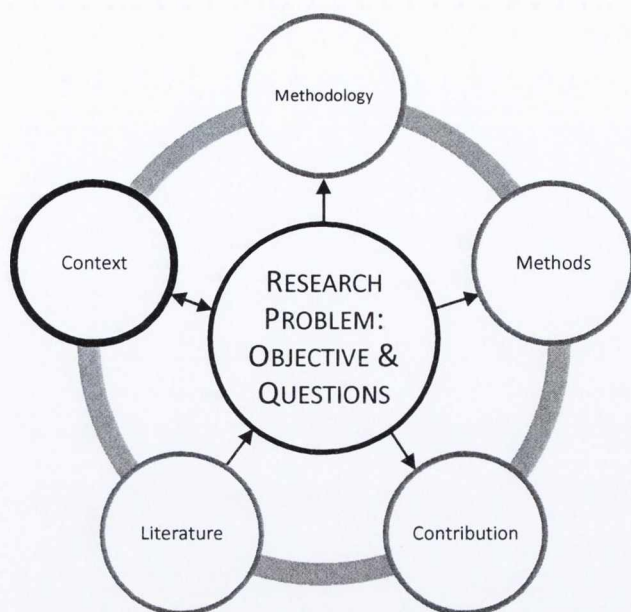
## CHAPTER 5

### CONTEXT REVISITED:

### THE LABORATORY

### MODERNISATION AND

### RECONFIGURATION STRATEGY



#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to explore the nature, expression and impact of workplace IR conflict. Owing to the context-specific nature of IR conflict (Barbash, 1979; Edwards *et al.*, 1995), this study is located in a healthcare setting. However, cognisant of the multiple layers of IR context (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008) and the pluralist character of the healthcare sector (Denis *et al.*, 2001) this study employs an embedded case study design in the Medlab workplace<sup>37</sup>. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this setting. In addition, the chapter will discuss the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (LMRS) which, as the tracer issue for this research study, acted as an additional context for workplace IR conflict<sup>38</sup>.

This author is reminded that the walls of the workplace are a 'semi-permeable membrane' simultaneously influencing, and being influenced by, forces beyond its boundary (Edwards, 2003:29). Therefore, this Chapter will consider contextual features within and beyond the Medlab. Section 5.2 considers the nature of work, technology and employees which characterise this workplace setting, before Section 5.3 examines historical relations pertinent to the Medlab

<sup>37</sup> In line with the selection of healthcare as a research setting, the Medlab workplace was selected due to its multiple groups, multi-unionism, growing demand, and reduced budgets. In addition, the most studied groups in the sector are doctors and nurses. Therefore, in providing varying degrees of patient contact, this setting offers an alternative perspective for healthcare research.

<sup>38</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, this strategy was selected as the tracer issue for this study on the basis of a review of Labour Court cases concerning hospitals 2000-2010 (Cowman & Keating, 2010). This review enabled the identification of themes pertaining of IR conflict in the setting. These themes were then used to locate a tracer issue where IR conflict was likely to emerge. This approach, in line with Pan and Tan (2011), allowed the researcher to reduce risk associated with case study research. Further, the tracer issue acted as an extreme (Flybjerg, 2004) or exemplar (Yin, 2009) context for workplace IR conflict.

setting. In line with the role of managerial objectives and their influence on the nature of IR conflict (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987), Section 5.4 examines the provisions of the LMRS. Subsequently, Section 5.5 – adopting a rules perspective (Barbash, 1979) – discusses the fate of the LMRS in the context of collective bargaining machinery and dispute resolution provisions enshrined in the PSA (2010-2014). To conclude the Chapter will revisit the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 to consider how the features of the Medlab setting, and the fate of the LMRS, may shape the findings presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

## **5.2 THE MEDLAB SETTING: THE NATURE OF WORK, TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE**

Key factors in the intra-plant context include the nature of the work (Margerison, 1969), the technology that shapes it (Edwards, 1992), and the occupational cultures of employees (Turnbull, 1992). In addition, the key stakeholders – identified by the HSE as the Faculty of Pathology, the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association (MLSA), the Academy of Medical Laboratory Science (AMLS), SIPTU and IMPACT - play a role. The Medlab setting, reflecting the pluralist nature of healthcare, is further comprised of multiple groups including: medical laboratory scientists of varying grades and specialities; phlebotomists; medical lab aides; support staffs; and consultants. These features, creating the social context and the work environment, inform the substance of conflict, and its nature.

Work in the Medlab, situated in a hospital context, has at its core the patient. The foremost role of the Medical Scientist profession relates to the "delivery of high quality, reliable Pathology services" in collaboration with Laboratory Consultants (O'Connell *et al.*, 2001:6). Specifically, work hinges on the provision of "investigative procedures required for the diagnosis of clinical disease and the monitoring of therapy" where "[t]he Laboratory provides consultative, advisory and analytical services" (ibid). The provision of healthcare creates notable dynamics with regard to the expression and impact of IR conflict. Internally, healthcare professionals discuss the ethical ramifications of industrial action. O'Brien (1987:247) questions the appropriateness of "any form of industrial action in the medical profession carries the potential for causing considerable hardship and harm to those very people that doctors are there to serve, namely the patients". Devine (2012) identifies similar concerns in the Medlab noting, in the context of the 1969 strike (see below), the slow escalation and provision of emergency cover. Loewy (2000) explains that, with regard to industrial action, Healthcare professionals face a different level of responsibility than the average employee. He concludes that "[e]xcept in the pocketbook, strikes in the healthcare setting generally do not directly hurt the employer. The employer is hurt through the patient" (p.516). Public perception and the role of the media is also significant in this regard. Ingrid Miley, industrial and employment correspondent for RTE, explains that disputes that are in

danger of causing disruption to the public will receive media attention (2012). Therefore, the tolerance of the public, particularly in the context of disrupted public services, will influence the utility of strike action (Stern, 1964).

Beyond the patient, the nature of work in the Medlab setting is shaped by technology where the "interface between Medicine and Science is becoming ever more essential as a result of advances made in science and technology over the past 25 years" (O'Connell *et al.*, 2001:6). Further, the medical model has moved toward Evidence Based Medicine (EBM), and Evidence Based Laboratory Medicine (EBLM) which reduces the emphasis on intuition and clinical experience highlighting the need for 'best evidence' in clinical decision making (Price, 2000; Badrick, 2013). Consequently, the role of the Medlab is expanding. However, the impact of technology is evident in other guises where, in response to burgeoning demand for services, near patient testing and automation is being pursued (Zinn *et al.*, 2001; O'Connell *et al.*, 2001; Teamwork Management Services, 2007). In addition the Medical Laboratory Assistant role was introduced "not to impinge on that of the Medical Scientist but add to the development of skill mix" (O'Connell *et al.*, 2001:21).

The nature of the work and workplace technology can influence occupational culture and employee behaviour (Edwards, 1992) which is in turn connected to a group's level of militancy (Turnbull, 1992; Edwards *et al.*, 1995). Solidarity is another consideration where groups in healthcare are known for cohesive, tribal behaviour (Denis *et al.*, 2001; Mitchie & West, 2004). Historically, the Medlab group have been considered highly cohesive (Devine, 2012). This was attributed to the age of employees; a lack of power distance between grades; established social interaction; and physical distance delineating laboratory staff from their hospital colleagues (*ibid*). However, case data departs from this characterisation of the Medlab cohort where participants recounted fractured interests and a lack of social engagement. Participants also described the group as non-militant. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"They don't think they can [get] anything done with it... I think that's the case on a national level. But... our group of people would not be militant people... I keep saying that, but like it really is true... [W]e had marches...against the... the cutbacks... I'd say four people from our place were there now, you know. Now they all had the same problems... but they won't face it" (Union,  $\alpha$ )

"...instead of people sticking together. Sometimes at those meetings you feel like - not that the Lab Aids pull apart, but they don't stick together" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\gamma$ ).

These factors – the nature of work, technology, and occupational culture – and their connection to the nature of conflict have often been considered in terms of manual workers (Edwards, 1992; Turnbull, 1992) and employees in call centres (Bain & Taylor, 2000; Mullholland, 2004; Townsend,



2005; Belanger & Edwards, 2013). However, the specificities of professional work are worthy of attention (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Lewin, 2008). The ensuing section considers historical relations as a feature of the setting influencing the nature of IR conflict where the issue of militancy is revisited in relation to historical conflict.

### 5.3 HISTORICAL RELATIONS

The employment relationship, and the quality of historical employer-employee relations are considered key factors influencing the nature of conflict (Craig, 1967; Blyton & Turnbull, 1994). Relations in the public service have been determined by Social Partnership, and indeed its demise, for over two decades (Doherty, 2011). Thus, while a brief overview was provided in Chapter 2, at this juncture the author considers how the limitations of this process and its breakdown, might shape the nature of IR conflict in this setting. However, informed by Craig (1967) and Pondy (1967), the discussion begins with an outline of historical conflict in the Medlab setting.

#### Historical Conflict

The familiarity of disputants informs the conflict process where experience guides behaviour; predictions regarding the behaviour of others; and responses (Weingart *et al.*, 2014). Conflict aftermath (Pondy, 1967) also informs future conflict episodes, the affects of actors (Stringer & Brown, 2008), and the trust between them (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987). Consequently, historical conflict in the Medlabs shapes contemporary conflict in Medlabs. While relations in Irish healthcare "have tended to be highly adversarial, traditional and defensive, with frequent disputes arising over any changes" (Dobbins, 2009b), healthcare is a pluralist setting (Denis, 2001). Therefore differences may emerge. Compared to some healthcare cohorts, Medlab employees have not exhibited highly militant behaviour. The group has chosen to avoid strike action pursued by others in the healthcare setting, and the public service more generally (HSE, 2009; McCarthy, 2009). Cognisant of the differences between occupations regarding militancy, Devine (2012:30) notes:

"Laboratory staffs were not dockers or factory workers steeped in trade union militancy and class consciousness. Surely, when a storm inevitably blew, the untested MLTA [Medical Laboratory Technologists' Association now MLSA] vessel would founder on the first rocks it encountered"

Nevertheless, the 1960s saw a variety of disputes emerge between Medical Scientists and their employers. These related to grading, wages, on-call payments and working days. Devine (2012:23) explains that the "...welter of demands spoke volumes for the awareness and impatience of members but also for the absence of any national or integrated bargaining structure or standard contract". In 1966, on-call services were temporarily withdrawn in voluntary hospitals triggering

the principle of "per call per patient" (ibid:21). Similarly, members issued claims for a five day working week where Saturday work was contentious. While delays were evident in the resolution of claims, Devine concludes: "MLTA members were well served even if the meal was often very cold when it finally reached the table" (p.21).

A key event relates to the Association's first strike in 1969. The strike was foreshadowed by a dispute relating to pay and grading heard by the Labour Court in 1963. The Court's recommendation was rejected by the committee who considered it "grossly inadequate" (ibid:7). Following this an improved Recommendation was issued and accepted, albeit under protest. However, the effects of the grievance loomed. Revised claims were submitted in 1965 and 1968 where the latter focused on pay. Union leadership, holding the view that the Labour Court had not been 'impartial or fair', sought arbitration under Section 70, Industrial Relations Act 1970. However, management rejected the request. With almost unanimous support, strike action commenced on June 26th. Though emergency services were provided, the *Irish Independent* warned that 'Dublin faces one of the biggest crises in its medical history' (Devine, 2012). However, participating staff were "largely immunised against loss of earnings" where "non-striking staffs were levied 5% of their salaries, giving strikers 95% of their normal income" (ibid:43). On July 18th, strike action was suspended following the pleas of the Blood Bank Medical Director to the then Minister: "there will be deaths" (ibid:45). Management subsequently agreed to arbitration. The Irish Medical Laboratory Technologist (cited by Devine, 2012:49) described the action as "masterful – and successful". While other disputes emerged over the years, the 1969 strike was considered a turning point for Medlab employees where the "MLTA could look management straight in the eye with equality and pride" (Devine, 2012:50). The MLSA reflects:

"The outcome was successful and it was the only time in the Association's history that it had to resort to a national strike to achieve its goals"<sup>39</sup>

Drawing on strike activity as the foremost indicator of IR conflict, Medlabs – like Irish healthcare more broadly – are not particularly conflict prone. Nevertheless a variety of issues, many of which are reminiscent of those preceding events in 1969, now face the setting signalling the potential for IR conflict. This is considered further in Section 5.4. However, attention now turns to Social Partnership and its role in shaping relations and conflict.

### **Social Partnership**

Doherty and Erne (2010) argue that Social Partnership and the public sector are closely connected where, arising from higher union density, public sector unions have had greater influence over

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<sup>39</sup> MLSA Website, About MLSA Accessed at 5/3/15.

national agreements. Beyond economic success, Irish Social Partnership was credited industrial stability (Bacarro, 2003; Teague & Donaghey, 2009) and a move away from adversarial relations (D'Art and Turner, 1999). This national model was premised on "core principles: mutuality; dignity; respect; fairness; competitiveness; flexibility; flexibility; and joint regulation and direct communication and consultation" and the idea of a 'win-win' outcome for all stakeholders (Rittau & Dundon, 2010:10). However, many authors identified key limitations (Rittau & Dundon, 2010).

Irish Social Partnership created a two-tier system at national and workplace level (Teague & Hann, 2008; Doherty & Erne, 2010). Roche and Teague (2014:781) explain that in the mid-1990s the Social Partners were concerned that the corporatist model was overly macro in its orientation leaving "manager-employer relations inside organization... mostly untouched by the principles and values of social partnership". However, while enterprise level initiatives were considered successful (ibid; Rittau & Dundon, 2010), their diffusion and depth was lacking (Doherty, 2009). This was attributed to a lack of buy-in amongst key stakeholders (Teague, 2004). Doherty and Erne (2010) found that, while public sector attitudes toward Social Partnership were often positive, employees held a more negative view of *workplace* partnership. These authors explain that local level initiatives in the public sector have often been used as a "means of facilitating the implementation of a pre-determined management reform agenda" (p.3). Similarly, Roche and Teague (2014:782) state that workplace partnerships "... remained managerial to prevailing decision making and management-union relations". Therefore a key failing of Social Partnership was to meaningfully connect national and local levels (Doherty & Erne, 2010). Consequently there was insufficient trust and commitment between the parties to successfully embed the process at the workplace level (Roche & Teague, 2014).

Further criticisms relate to the impact of Social Partnership on Trade Unions. Authors warned that partnership would erode union power, influence, and legitimacy where any derivative benefits of the process would favour management (Rittau & Dundon, 2010). While Social Partnership afforded unions a visible role and clear influence at the national level, the absence of local bargaining undermined the impact of the local union organisation suggesting 'national gain for local pain' (Doherty & Erne, 2010). Confirming fears, Doherty (2009) suggests that the influence of Trade Unions at the workplace level declined. National agreements were also subject to no-strike clauses (Doherty & Erne, 2010; Doherty, 2011) further constraining Trade Unions at the workplace level by restricting "traditional powers of opposition and veto" (Roche and Teague, 2014:787). Therefore, the managerial orientation of workplace partnership initiatives combined with a decline in union influence at the workplace level had serious implications for union-employee relations. Rittau and Dundon (2010) concur, finding that shop stewards reported a lower level of

respect for the union following unilateral management decisions that thwarted workplace partnership initiatives. These local representatives explained that shallow operationalisation of partnership at the workplace level undermined employee trust in the union which, once damaged, was difficult to restore. Thus, while providing a seat at the national table, Social Partnership came at a cost for Trade Unions.

Social Partnership determined relations between the parties to the Medlab setting for over two decades. Moreover, the limitations of the process are also key inputs in the conflict process. Evidence suggests that Social Partnership restricted local level negotiation (Doherty & Erne, 2010); precluded industrial action (Doherty, 2010; Roche & Teague, 2014); diminished Trade Union influence in the workplace (Doherty, 2009); and damaged relations between unions and members (Rittau & Dundon, 2010). This has clear implications for the nature of IR conflict in the setting. However the *breakdown* of relations may prove ever more significant in shaping the nature of IR conflict.

#### Social Partnership: 'Game' Over

In the context of the Great Recession, Social Partnership – premised on the aforementioned principles of joint regulation and consultation – was abandoned (Roche, 2014). The Irish government imposed unilateral pay cuts on employees in the public service (Dobbins & Dundon, 2007), and exhibited a significant turnaround in attitude toward Trade Unions (Culpepper & Regan, 2014). This departure from Social Partnership signals a turning point in the historical relations between the key actors in the public service: government as employer; Trade Unions; and public sector employees. Against this backdrop, one might expect a return to adversarial relations. However, this has not been the case with Ireland remaining "so apparently orderly" (Roche, 2013:211). Nevertheless, this change had implications throughout the IR system and the healthcare setting. The National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP) and the Health Service National Partnership Forum (HSNPF) were dismantled in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Moreover, "forums intended to renew partnership in the health service have not been activated" (Roche & Teague, 2014:784). That said, the HSE Employee Handbook (2014:16) identifies employee entitlements to information, consultation *and* workplace partnership where Trade Unions represent "employees through an agreed partnership process...". Similar documentation was identifiable in case sites. However, perhaps owing to a lack of buy-in (Teague, 2004); its connection with the now abandoned Social Partnership; or its role as an implementation device for management (Doherty & Erne, 2010), there were few references to workplace partnership in the data. A view emerged that Partnership, in all its guises, was over. Excerpts are provided overleaf.

"...the large hospitals would have had partnership facilitators. They're people who try and encourage...partnership through unions and management coming together at different levels. Now, we don't have a partnership facilitator here anymore, there isn't the same emphasis on partnership as there was five/ten years ago" (HR, α)

"We had an old partnership committee here, between management now for all areas... it [was] part of the partnership agreements that we used to..." (Union, α)

In many regards the most significant impact of its downfall relates to the quality of relations. This is particularly salient in the public service where the dominant 'partner' also acts as employer. The Irish Government's departure from Social Partnership was sudden, while unilateral pay cuts pose stark contrast to the ideals of Partnership. Doherty (2011) writes "[t]he partners quickly (and brutally) brought an end to the affair". Consequently, the level of trust between the parties has likely been undermined (Wall, 2012). In addition, the role of Trade Unions in the sector has been destabilised. Reflective of the view that Social Partnership was "the only game in town" (Donaghey & Teague, 2007:39), Trade Unions were the most eager of the partners to sustain the process (Doherty, 2011). Industrial action was both minimal and delayed where Trade Unions tried to facilitate further talks. While influence at the workplace level was waning pre-partnership demise (Doherty, 2009), the collapse of the process has compounded this loss of power (Culpepper & Regan, 2014). Ultimately two decades of centralised bargaining replete with no-strike clauses has allowed union expertise at the workplace level to atrophy (Doherty, 2011).

Finally, there has been a deterioration of the public image of public sector unions, and the public service more generally (ibid). Roche (2010:212) states:

"... commentary... often reflects hostility to public servants [who] are portrayed as cosseted, grossly overpaid and oblivious to developments in the wider commercial world. They and their unions are parodied as the ultimate self-protecting vested interests, with little concern for the public interest..."

Miley (2012:221) explains that during the spate of "rows in the public sector" the media "were subjected to off the record briefings aimed at building media 'leverage'" causing observers to speculate whether Social Partnership might have survived if it had been 'spun differently'.

These views were evident in case data. Participants argued that Social Partnership damaged the effectiveness of the Trade Union. In particular media coverage of public sector unions and employees was considered negative and hostile. This process of 'Public Service Bashing' (Chief Medical Scientist, α) triggered fear and shame where some employees actively hid their employment in social settings. Excerpts are provided below.

"I think a lot of that has to do with the... Partnership Agreements between the unions and say, the Fianna Fail government... that would stretch back... nearly twenty years... [W]e have a very young lab staff, they have all grown up in this, there hasn't been strikes

because ...there was National Agreements... so that sort of, I don't know, took away the need for any sort of local strikes...partnership has sort of dulled people's sense of empowerment..." (Union, α)

"Nobody likes to be vilified in the press, nobody... all you have to do is listen to the likes of Morning Ireland or Joe Duffy... they are there morning, noon and night, giving out about the public service and the health service. Well, I know personally – I mean, it's hard, it's difficult. I know colleagues who will not go out in public and say that they work in the HSE..." (Chief Medical Scientist, θ).

The 'brutal' end of Social Partnership has fundamentally, if not irrevocably, impacted on trust in the public sector employment relationship. Wall (2012:78) explains that the "...trust and understandings engendered in partnership are likely to have dissipated" where "[s]ome of the mechanisms for dispute resolution it fashioned [are] no longer... available to moderate and mediate conflict". He concludes that "it must be of concern that the anger evident among workers...will find a new outlet" (ibid). Meanwhile Trade Unions in the sector face further challenges to their power, and their ability to mobilise. Therefore, in exploring the nature of IR conflict in the Medlab setting, Social Partnership – its limitations and demise – are notable inputs. A further "legacy of the process is evident in the Croke Park Agreement [PSA1]" (Roche, 2012:144) which includes provisions for the reform of Medlabs, and mechanisms to manage any arising conflict (PSA, 2010-2014).

#### **5.4 THE LABORATORY MODERNISATION AND RECONFIGURATION STRATEGY**

Cappelli and McKersie (1987) assert that "one of the most important factors changing the system of industrial relations...is the strategies and decisions by management in response to a changing environment". Therefore, as noted in Chapter 4, this study employed the tracer method (see McDermott & Keating, 2012, Denis *et al.*, 2001) whereby a single strategy was selected to act as a context for the emergence of workplace IR conflict. Having introduced the Medlab context, this section will provide an overview of the tracer issue: the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy - LMRS.

In the wake of Social Partnership's demise and unilateral pay cuts, "a national one-day public sector strike was held" (Farrelly, 2011). However, the McCarthy (2009) notes that "[m]embers of the Irish Medical Organisation, the Irish Hospital Consultants Association, the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association did not ballot for industrial action". Following this, while many union executives in the public sector recommended against acceptance of PSA (2010-2014) "the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association...backed the deal" (Walsh, 2010). The Public Service Agreement (PSA, 2010-2014), ultimately accepted by the MLSA, SIPTU, IMPACT and other health sector unions, was finalised in March 2010 through extensive negotiations facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission (LRC). The purpose of the agreement is to restore public finances through

public sector reform and a reduction in numbers employed (Boyle, 2011). The Public Service Agreement (2010-2014:2.9.15), recognising the previous interactions of the stakeholders regarding laboratory modernisation, states:

"as part of the transformation programme across the health service, a process involving all relevant stakeholders is well advanced to deliver major change to the medical laboratory services and associated work practices. The programme will deliver the optimal structures to ensure a quality and fit for purpose 24 hour service".

The environment faced by Irish healthcare in general, and Medlabs in particular has exhibited extensive change. The international and national economy plummeted into the recession (Roche, 2014) triggering a deep fiscal crisis. Meanwhile the demand for laboratory medicine, mirroring that of healthcare services (McDermott & Keating, 2014), has increased as the role of the service expanded (Price, 2000; O'Connell *et al.*, 2001; Badrick, 2013). Consequently, cost reduction – and the change required to achieve it – emerged at the centre of the PSA agenda. However, pre-recession, O'Connell *et al.*, (2001:7) write:

"Laboratories now account for a large proportion of a hospital's budget and there is an onus and responsibility on laboratory staff to ensure that this investment is spent wisely and in the best interests of the patients".

Therefore, balancing resource allocation and patient care have been long standing concerns. However, amid resource constraints, this issue is emboldened. Laboratory services are considered an area where management can reduce costs without reducing services (National Service Plan, 2011). Therefore, enabled by provisions in the PSA (2010-2014), the HSE is pursuing the Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy (Workforce Planning Strategy for the Health Services 2009–2012). This live strategy, selected as the tracer issue in this study, includes a variety of measures:

- Creation of a single HSE framework for all medical laboratory services in Ireland.
- Reconfiguration of hospital laboratories into a national network separating testing into 'hot' and 'cold' streams.
- Non-urgent and routine tests are to be processed in dedicated 'cold' hub labs at high volumes with automation to improve efficiency.
- Urgent and non-routine testing is to remain at hospital labs, or 'hot' spoke labs.
- Introduction of the extended working day where core laboratory hours operate from 8am to 8pm.
- Point of Care Testing.
- Changes in skill mix including an increase in Medical Laboratory Assistants.

- Revised on-call payments abolishing 'fee per test' remuneration.

Cowman and Keating (2013) indicated that pay, grading, change, working hours and redeployment were key themes of IR conflict in the Irish hospital sector. Therefore the LMRS, including each of these, was considered a useful backdrop for the investigation of workplace IR conflict. Further, returning to section 5.3, the measures included in the strategy are reminiscent of key disputes in the history of the Medlab setting. Specifically, disputes preceding the 1969 MLTA strike related to wages, on-call payments, grading, and working hours. The consistency between the LMRS, IR conflict themes in the sector, and issues of historical conflict in the Medlab setting are presented in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Comparing Consistency: IR Conflict Themes, the LMRS, and Historical conflict

<b>Themes of IR Conflict in Irish Hospitals</b>	<b>Laboratory Modernisation and Reconfiguration Strategy Provisions</b>	<b>Disputes Pre 1969 MLTA Strike</b>
Pay	Revised on-call payments	Wages, On-call pay
Grading	Implications for promotion opportunities*	Grading Structure
Change	Changes to working hours, skill mix, work practices & place of work	-
Working Hours	Extended working day, 8-8 and Moves toward 5 over 7 roster	Saturday Work
Compensation	Loss of earnings claim	-
Redeployment /Relocation	Redeployment necessary for reconfiguration	-
Loss of Earnings	Loss of earnings claim due to revised on-call	-
Discrimination	-	-
Parity	Issues pertaining to parity between revised on-call payments for urban laboratory staff versus rural equivalents*	Status and parity relative to other healthcare professions
Bullying	-	-

\*These issues were identified through analysis of interview data.

Of particular interest are the provisions in the LMRS which relate to redeployment, the extended working day; and revised on-call payments. These provisions, incorporated into the PSA (2010-2014:15), represent significant changes in the employment relationship. The ultimate objective of the LMRS is to reconfigure services and increase efficiency by (i) reducing replication costs and regional cost-per-test variations; (ii) introducing automated testing and changes in skill mix; and (iii) workforce reduction. There are two types of laboratory services: 'hot' services as urgent or non-routine, and 'cold' services which are routine and less time sensitive. The first type typically relates to the acute hospital setting while the latter is associated with the primary and community setting. The LMRS aims to separate services and regionalise 'cold' lab work into a number of hubs



across the country. This reconfiguration will necessitate redeployment of Medlab employees. The Public Sector Agreement (PSA) (2010-2014) highlights the importance of flexible redeployment:

“The required reorganisation will focus on: ... (e) delivering better health outcomes and more cost efficient services by reconfiguring a range of other services including the National Cancer Control Programme, Vision for Change, the medical laboratory service and pre-hospital emergency services...” (PSA, 2010-2014:15).

There LMRS has, as noted in Chapter 4, two strategy directions where spoke labs will lose 'cold' services, and staff, to hub labs. The modernisation of Medlabs, and the "very significant redeployment" is, according to Sean McGrath, demonstrative of change under PSA1 (Farrelly, 2011).

The extended working day requires that Medlab employees are liable to be rostered between 8am and 8pm from Monday to Friday where the same core hours apply over a longer time period. This change aims to “recognise the 24/7 nature of healthcare delivery”; increase the throughput of cases; provide more accessible services to the community; and facilitate the extension of outpatient clinics" (IRN 44, 2009). In addition the extended working day provides a cost saving with regard to on-call premia.

Another key change in this regard relates to the revised on-call payments which will generate an estimate savings of €5 million per annum. The previous system for on-call out of hours emergency work has been replaced. On-call employees now receive a flat rate per hours worked (HSE HR Circular 001/2011; Farrelly, 2011) rather than the "fee per call per patient" negotiated in 1966 (Devine, 2012). Consequently, laboratory scientists – particularly those in large hospitals – have experienced a significant loss of earnings on top of previously imposed pay cuts. IRN estimates this loss at up to 50% for some medical scientists amounting to €20,000 (Farrelly, 2011). Ward (2011:3) comments:

"The changes for staff under this agreement are considerable... it is worth remembering that these changes are being introduced against a challenging backdrop of a staffing moratorium and substantial budget reduction"

The extended working day and revised on-call payments have been agreed and implemented (Farrelly, 2011) while progress is set to continue regarding reconfiguration and redeployment over the coming years. Despite implementation significant changes to working hours and pay – and more change ahead – no strike action has emerged. Ward (2011) concludes "that without the Agreement [PSA 2010-2014] the possibility of reform is negligible with the real possibility of a gradual descent into industrial unrest". Thus, the following section explores the fate of the LMRS

in the context of the collective bargaining machinery and the 'web of rules' contained in PSA1 (2010-2014).

## **5.5 MANAGING CONFLICT IN MEDLABS: CONSIDERING THE RULES PERSPECTIVE**

The Public Service Agreement 1 (2010-2014:2.7) states that "[o]rganisational and service change, on this scale... requires robust consultation with the trade unions... to assist implementation of the required change in an atmosphere of industrial peace". In accordance with this provision, and that of Appendix 1 - Service Delivery Options PSA (2010-2014), management engaged in extensive consultation and discussion with the MLSA, IMPACT, and SIPTU regarding the changes proposed in the LMRS<sup>40</sup>. The Health Sector Implementation Body, set up under PSA (2010-2014), intervened to address process issues (HSE HR Circular 001/2011). Subsequently, the parties commenced discussions under paragraph 1.23 and 1.24 of the PSA under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC). These provisions require that the "[p]arties agree they will seek to resolve disagreements where they arise promptly" and cooperate with change pending the outcome of the IR process. The provisions further hold that should the parties fail to reach an agreement within six weeks, or a timeframe established by the Implementation Body, the matter is referred to the LRC or the Labour Court or, in the final instance, to the Arbitration Board.

Facilitated by the LRC, agreement was reached between the parties in relation to the extended working day on a 5/5 basis where work between 6pm and 8pm attracts a payment of time plus 1/6th (ibid). The move toward a 5/6 or 5/7 day roster is to be introduced on a phased basis subject to service requirements and local level consultation. In addition there was agreement on the revised payment structure for emergency out of hours work. However, the parties could not reach agreement regarding (i) the payment for off-site standby, or midnight-8am; and (ii) compensation for loss of earnings arising due to the revised on-call payments (HSE HR Circular 001/2011; Farrelly, 2011). These issues were the subject of a Labour Court hearing in January 2011 (LCR19995).

The unions involved, the MLSA and Impact, argued that the revised working arrangements and changes to on-call remuneration will result in substantial losses for members that work "regular routine emergency on-call rosters". It was further argued that those who have participated in emergency sessional work for many years will no longer have access to out-of-hours premiums. This, according to the union representatives, was beyond normal ongoing change and the

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<sup>40</sup> This included four regional briefing sessions where plans regarding reconfiguration were communicated to stakeholders who were subsequently invited to make submissions for hub lab designations. The researcher observed each of the briefing sessions.

provisions contained in the PSA (2010-2014). Management held that they have been charged with implementing a budget reduction of €746 million whilst maintaining service levels. Consequently, Management proposed reviewing the impact of changes on staff at a future date, noting that the need to provide a leaner service is central to the PSA. The Labour Court recommended that the out-of-hours payment from midnight-8am should be paid at an hourly rate of €47.80 and that the off-site standby rate paid to Theatre nurses be applied to employees associated with the claim. With regard to the loss of earnings, the Court applied the now termed 'Mulvey formula' (Farrelly, 2011) of 1.5 times actual loss to be paid in two equal instalments 12 months and 18 months after the agreement is operational.

The MLSA confirmed its acceptance of the revised proposals following a ballot regarding the recommendation of the Court (Farrelly, 2011). However, on-call work is covered on a voluntary basis, and is not performed by all laboratory scientists. Therefore, participants explained that this ballot, and PSA1 more generally, was 'pushed' through by Medlab employees who have not been affected by loss of earnings. This signals two issues. First, mobilisation of collective action is contingent on the degree to which unions can identify common issues amongst members (Edwards, 2004). Second, perhaps related to diverging interests, the solidarity of the group was identified as a concern amongst participants. This was particularly evident between 'call' and 'non-call' employees. However, despite their common loss, divides *within* the affected cohort were also identifiable. These dynamics are illustrated in the following quotes:

"They don't have the money... what do you want to do? Strike over it?' 'No point striking because you're on-call. How many people are on-call here? Not many, so how many people are on-call and members? Even less. What is the point? They don't care'. You can't do it" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

"[laughs] I'm not actually involved in it... I wasn't in the on-call system... But people who were involved in it are very sore about... it was a matter of trust which has now been broken. I'd really have to think about it [strike]... they [management] keep pushing at a small group... see what happens and if they get away with it they pick another... the people who are affected by this are a small enough group... within the lab... so it depends, I don't know. Would I support them? Yes. How much will I support them? I'd have to think about that" (Senior Medical Scientist<sup>41</sup>).

"... no it [strike] wouldn't be something - and I could probably say that's probably the way for most of colleagues which may make us sound weak that we wouldn't stand up for it. I don't know, maybe historically it's the amount of money *they* used make on-call, I don't know. And if that went public there would be no sympathy!" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

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<sup>41</sup> Site descriptor removed to protect anonymity.

These accounts differ substantially to that provided in the context of the 1969 strike where observing members protected strikers from loss of earnings in order to 'share in the battle' (Devine, 2012:43). However, further 'battle' was on the horizon. It emerged that a small number of voluntary hospitals had not paid the loss of earnings sum recommended by the Labour Court. Fogarty (2013) reports, based on Health Sector Implementation Body minutes requested under the Freedom of Information Act, that over €1 million was owed to approximately 200 Medlab employees. Participants explained that there was conflict between some voluntary hospitals and the HSE regarding budgetary responsibility for compensation recommended by the Labour Court. Union leadership held the view that this issue, if not resolved, warranted strike action as the parties had 'exhausted the process'. Nevertheless, Medlab employees at the workplace level, though incensed, were divided on the potential response of strike action. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist<sup>42</sup> commented:

"Well we're talking of industrial action. This has only blown... there will be industrial action if they don't pay... we did the changes as soon as they wanted and we were kind of waiting and waiting and waiting but it's come to a head..."

The minutes concluded that that payments formed part of an agreement that had to be honoured (Fogarty, 2013). Thus, the issue was resolved when the hospitals in question agreed to pay the compensation recommended by the Labour Court. Many participants explained however that this sum was heavily taxed, and though the monies were not pensionable, they were reportedly subject to the pension levy.

As data collection proceeded, implementation of PSA 1 and the LMRS was pursued. Thus far the initiative has been considered a success, delivering €7m in savings annually - approximately €2m over initial estimates (Health Sector Action Plan Progress Report, 2011-2012). In addition, some redeployment has taken place. However, the hub lab designations have not been announced due to broader change in the sector including the introduction of hospital groups and the planned reorganisation of the HSE into directorates. Data collection also coincided with the negotiations of PSA 2 (2013-2016). This agreement was ultimately accepted by Medlab employees. However, its earlier iteration - recommended for acceptance by the MLSA - was rejected 59:41 (Rogers, 2013). The agreement involves provisions for an increment freeze, pay reductions for salaries over €65,000, increased working hours, greater emphasis on compulsory redeployment, and exceptions to the protection against compulsory redundancy. Against this backdrop, the LMRS was embedded in broader turbulence.

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<sup>42</sup> Site descriptor removed to protect anonymity.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

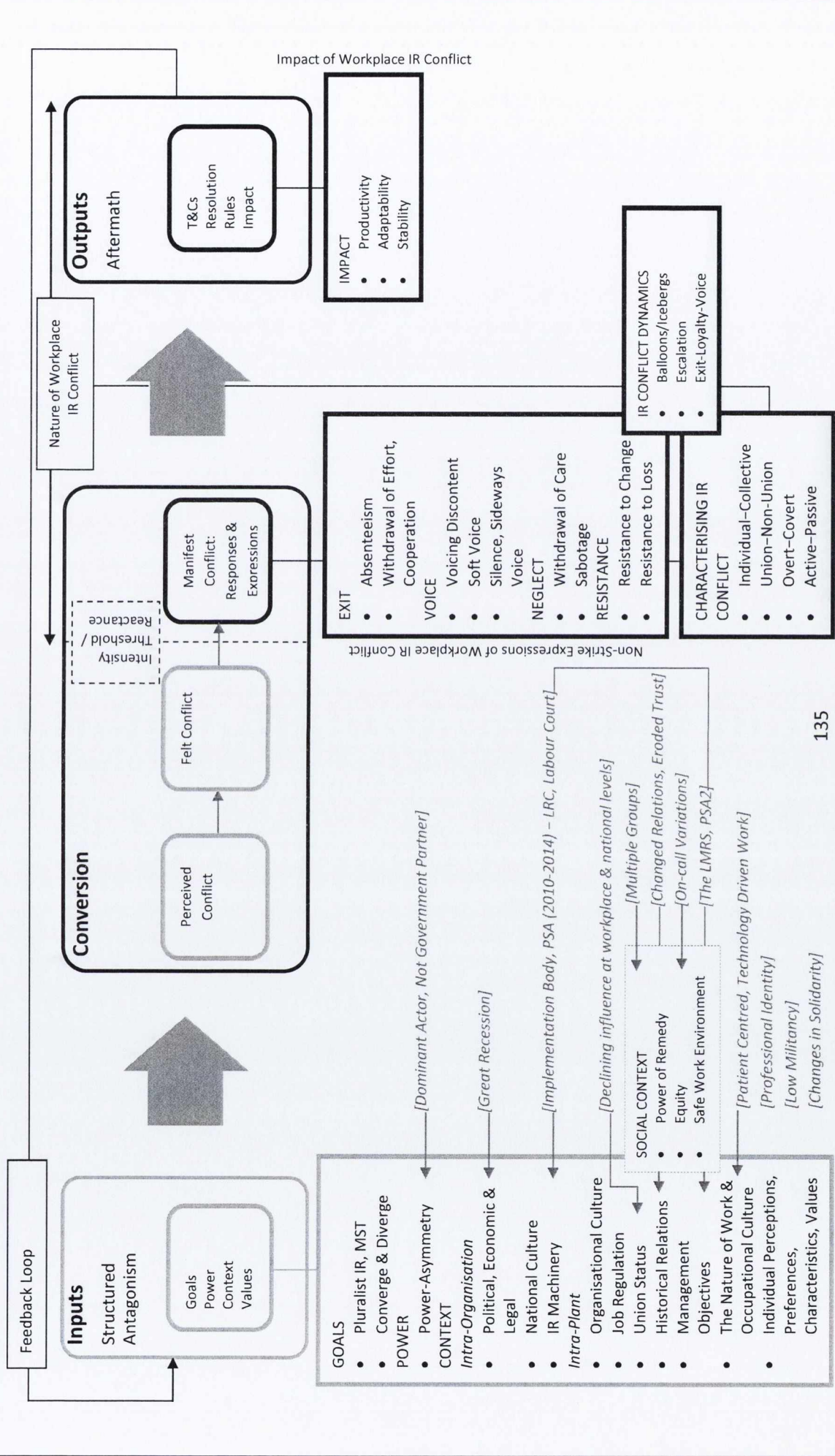
This chapter aimed to situate the research findings in their immediate empirical context. Figure 5.1 revisits the conceptual framework informing this study to illustrate how this context feeds into the IR conflict – its nature, expression and impact – presented in the forthcoming chapters.

Drawing on literature that suggests IR conflict is context-specific, the chapter provided an overview of the nature of work and technology in the setting which taken together shape occupational culture. Medlab scientists, as the most central group in this setting, provide laboratory services integral to patient care. The expanding remit of the work, in the wake of technological advances and a changing medical model, has increased service demand for Medlab work and the relationship between the work and the patient. However, the Medlab setting – reflecting the plurality of healthcare – consists of a multiplicity of groups, and interacts with many stakeholders. As such, the 'walls' of the Medlab are 'semi-permeable' where relations are shaped by an array of factors internal and external, past and present.

Historical conflict in the Medlab setting has been limited in terms of strike action where the group is generally not considered as militant as other groups in the sector. Nevertheless, Medlab employees have exhibited a high level of solidarity and mobilised successful strike action in 1969 over wages, on-call payment and grading. Perhaps most significant, however, in terms of historical relations in this setting is Social Partnership. The limitations of this process have weakened: the influence of Trade Unions at the workplace level (Doherty, 2011); trust between Trade Unions and their members (Rittau & Dundon, 2011); local negotiation skills (Doherty, 2011); and, arguably, employee empowerment (Union,  $\alpha$ ). The demise of this process, and the unilateral action of the employer, has had significant repercussions for trust relations (Wall, 2012) and further destabilised the position of public sector Trade Unions (Culpepper & Regan, 2014).

Figure 5.1: Conceptual Framework: Considering the Medlab Context & The LMRS

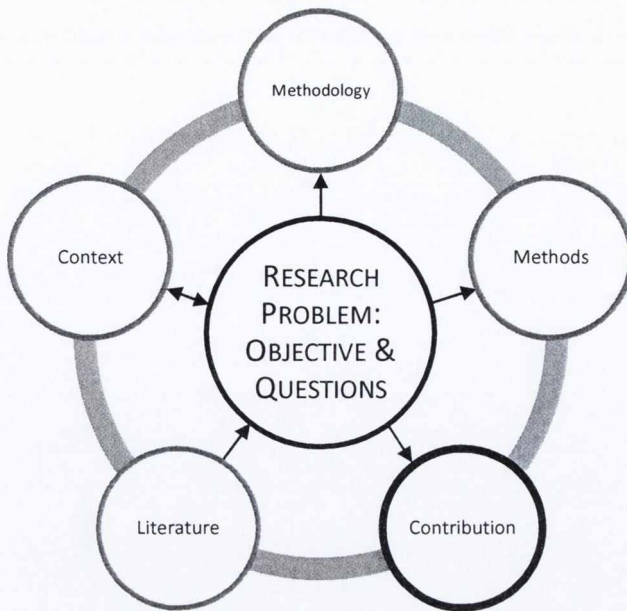
- IR is concerned with the employment relationship as the panoply of relations between employer and employee(s), or representatives thereof. This relationship, predicated on exchange, and an economic and psychological employment contract, is highly interdependent and power asymmetric.
- Workplace IR Conflict is the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment.



The fall of Social Partnership, and the emphasis on cost reduction to stave off fiscal crises, gave rise to the Public Service Agreement. This underpinned management objectives (Cappelli & McKersie, 1987) and provided the rules for conflict resolution (Barbash, 1979). As illustrated in Figure 5.1, these features of the context serve as inputs into the IR conflict process. The LMRS, as the tracer issue for this study, provides a context for IR conflict. This strategy includes: the extended working day and working week; revised on-call payments triggering substantial loss of earnings; changes in skill mix and automation; and the looming threat of redeployment. These issues, identified as themes of conflict in the sector (Cowman & Keating, 2013), reflect issues of historical conflict in the Medlab cohort. The collective bargaining machinery, and specifically the provisions in the PSA (2010-2014) for dispute resolution, have facilitated agreement on the LMRS in the LRC, and the Labour Court. However, some of the issues arising are not common amongst Medlab employees, while the group's historical solidarity may be in decline. Meanwhile, further change is on the horizon with PSA 2 (2013-2016), the introduction of hospital groups, and the reconfiguration of the health service into directorates. Therefore the context for IR conflict extends far beyond the LMRS.

Remaining cognisant of this empirical setting, the forthcoming chapters present the findings of this research study. Chapter 6 considers the first research question on the expressions of workplace IR conflict. Subsequently, Chapter 7 examines findings on the nature of workplace IR conflict, before providing findings on the second question: the impact of workplace IR conflict. The role of the healthcare context is also considered.

HOW DO EMPLOYEES EXPRESS  
WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL  
RELATIONS CONFLICT?



6.1 INTRODUCTION

This research dissertation set out to answer two research questions: how do employees express workplace IR conflict, and how do these expressions impact on the workplace. The study was exploratory and descriptive, and adopted a qualitative methodology to explore the nature or 'essence' of workplace IR conflict in a healthcare setting. Thus, the specific purpose of this Chapter is to present a descriptive overview of findings and analysis pertaining to the first research question;

*How do employees express workplace IR conflict (in a healthcare setting)?*

The findings will now be presented on the types of IR conflict expressions identified by participants and how they are enacted in the workplace. Drawing primarily from analysis of interview data - due to its consistency with the interpretive paradigm (O'Regan, 2009) - this Chapter describes and analyses the actions, interactions, and observations of participants regarding their own expressions of workplace IR conflict and those of their colleagues. It is useful to reiterate at this juncture that the purpose of the study was not to identify the most used or most significant expression, but rather to explore *how* employees express workplace IR conflict. Further, recalling Pondy (1967:303), and informed by phenomenology, behaviour is deemed as an expression of workplace IR conflict by participants themselves:

"[K]nowledge of the organizational requirements and of the expectations and motives of the participants appears to be necessary to characterize the behaviour as conflictful. This suggests that behaviour should be defined to be conflictful if, and only if, some or all of the participants perceive it to be conflictful".



Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 42 participants across four case sites where interviews lasted between 40 minutes and three hours. Participants in each case included: the Laboratory Manager, Chief Medical Scientists, Senior Medical Scientists; the HR/IR Manager; Trade Union Representatives; Phlebotomists; and Support Staff. These interviews were transcribed verbatim providing over 940 pages of raw data. The data was then subjected to six phases of iterative line-by-line analysis which was facilitated by NVivo. The data analysis strategy deployed both inductive and deductive approaches where initial themes were derived on a case-by-case basis. Following within-case analysis, three phases of analysis were conducted which focused on cross-case and aggregate analysis.

As indicated in Chapter 4, the case study design was comparative where four case sites were selected along two dimensions. In line with replication logic, differences were expected to emerge based on hospital type and strategy direction. It was anticipated that these comparative dimensions would allow differences to emerge at case level. This design also informed the case-by-case analysis strategy above which, in line with Eisenhardt's (1989) approach to theory-building, allowed for differences to emerge before building aggregate themes.

The Chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.2 begins by providing aggregate analysis of IR conflict expressions across the four case sites. Comparative analysis of the types of IR conflict expressions evident in the workplace is also presented. In order to deepen our understanding of the expressions and their nature, Section 6.3 clusters expressions into employee responses to workplace IR conflict: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fix. A descriptive overview of the expressions of workplace IR conflict evident in the case data is provided within these inductively derived categories. While key links to literature are signalled, in line with phenomenology and Eisenhardt's (1989) approach to theory-building, this chapter focuses on the lived experience of participants. Literature is 'enfolded' in Chapter 8 which discusses the relationship of the findings with existing research, and develops the research contributions. To conclude, Section 6.4 will revisit the first research question and synthesise the main conclusions as they relate to the broader research objective and the ensuing chapters.

## **6.2 EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

The first research question sought to establish how employees express IR conflict in the workplace. In this regard, the study is exploratory and descriptive. As such, the research is not concerned with what expressions are used most or what expression is most significant. The purpose is to establish *how* employees express IR conflict in the workplace. Table 6.1 sets out the

aggregate findings for the first research question: how do employees express workplace IR conflict?

Table 6.1: Expressions of Workplace Industrial Relations Conflict

Units of Meaning/Expressions Described	Interpretation /Analysis	Participants	Aggregate References
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... there would have been a pattern for Mondays... when the individual wouldn't turn up"</li> <li>• "... I think I would have to probably look down the lines of retirement and going out on the long term sick"</li> <li>• "Because if you get [annoyed] with somebody and you're a bit stressed, you go and ask the doctor for a sick cert"</li> </ul>	Absenteeism	38	554
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... giving out to the manager, giving out to the executive, maybe the odd annual leave or just mocking somebody in front..."</li> </ul>	Annual Leave	24	71
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "If someone is keying in demographics and there's loads of forms here and the phone is going, they're not concentrating on their work"</li> <li>• "The patient's going nowhere' [so they postpone work]... 'Well, maybe an intervention might be made faster.'"</li> </ul>	Neglect (-)	22	71
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I just want my job... basically. We've no choice really, you know"</li> <li>• "Obviously, most of us still need to work, there's nobody who can say... 'okay, I don't need a job'... because we wouldn't be here now if we didn't need a job"</li> </ul>	Quitting (-)	27	103
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... the flexibility in relation to change or dealing with change... is probably the biggest one"</li> <li>• "people kind of more or less refused to take on the roles... Yeah, maybe as they saw it, [as more] responsibility"</li> <li>• "I've been working here for twenty years and I have free parking, I don't know why they take that away from you"</li> <li>• "Because in fairness, they only had - their contracts were Monday to Friday, now you wanted them to work weekends"</li> </ul>	Resistance	41	889
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... I've never come [sabotage]... never. And I think the reason for that is because you're dealing with human samples...</li> <li>• "We would have had our suspicions that there was some sabotage... you know, an instruction that was issued and then... 'I was too busy to do that, I didn't get round to it'... And then it would have had huge consequences if this work wasn't done."</li> </ul>	Sabotage (-)	19	51

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... we're not a country [that] needs a strike... I wouldn't be involved, I would - I don't know, maybe I'd go sick that day!"</li> <li>• "I think it would take - I can't imagine a strike to be honest"</li> <li>• "I just hope to God they don't go on strike"</li> <li>• "I must say I would - I would nearly go on strike for [additional hours in PSA 2]"</li> </ul>	Strike (-)	30	317
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Tardiness... occasionally. We did have one issue with it, but the person was told, 'Look, if there's a problem with you getting to work on time, we can shorten your lunch hour or you can take annual leave"</li> <li>• "... just really time-keeping so that was an easy enough one, no matter what, you know the way, the time-keeping just seemed to be"</li> </ul>	Tardiness	17	52
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "People... complain about various things or there might be written complaints or verbal complaints"</li> <li>• "... we were giving out about it the whole time ourselves at break and lunches and I suppose everyone was just sick of talking about it then so eventually we just stopped"</li> <li>• "... well what you try and do is put forward, you know, try to come up with a solution that's going to fix it"</li> <li>• "I think most people keep their head down, they don't want to rock the boat"</li> </ul>	Voice	42	1335
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Well if that's the way it's going to go they're going to get less out of me"</li> <li>• "Do it but don't push yourself"</li> <li>• "They certainly don't get more cooperative"</li> <li>• "... not giving that commitment saying... 'We'll walk out the door'... and no matter what they were leaving to the next person"</li> </ul>	Withdrawal	40	655

Excerpts of coded text taken from transcribed interviews are provided in the first column. The second column indicates how these pieces of data - or units of meaning - were interpreted. The final two columns show how many participants<sup>43</sup> in the study described these expressions and how many units of meaning were coded in each category. From Table 6.1 it can be seen that, perhaps with the exception of annual leave, the data confirms the existence of IR conflict expressions listed in existing literature. However, the forms of these expressions and the nuance of their use in the four cases departs in some regards from our traditional understanding. This is explored in the descriptive overview of each expression.

At this juncture it is useful to note the variety of expressions described by participants, some of which are further divided in the description which follows. This variation continues in how employees use this menu of expressions when aggrieved with management or their employer. It is also of note that within this “menu” of identified expressions, participants expressed a reluctance to use certain forms, such as neglect, quitting, sabotage and strike. These expressions are therefore marked with a minus sign in the Table. The reluctance to use these expressions is explored further within this Chapter, and the next.

In line with the interpretive approach, the number of participants who described an expression or the number of units coded to a particular expression are not indicative of significance. Significance or meaning is found instead in what participants say, not the frequency of statements. Further, the number of references can be influenced by the skill development of the researcher and the questions posed. For example, the interview schedules presented in Chapter 4 included questions on the use of the strike expression. However, no questions focused on the use of annual leave. As such, inferring significance from the number of references to the strike expression over annual leave is erroneous. Despite these important caveats, the purpose of this Table is to demonstrate that the findings are grounded in the data; to signal research dependability; and authenticity. As noted in Chapter 4, fit is used as a form of defensible reasoning in this research dissertation. Thus, the purpose of this Table is to demonstrate fit between the data and the findings presented. Odena (2013) argues that rather than detracting from descriptive qualitative analysis, demonstrating how many participants converged on a particular topic and how many times this topic emerged as meaningful in the data strengthens the trustworthiness of research findings. Transferability and dependability of findings is improved by the use of a comparative case study design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is considered in the following section.

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<sup>43</sup> There were 42 participants across the four case study sites.

EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Drawing on the Eisenhardt (1989) approach to theory-building, data analysis included a comparative phase before the identification of aggregate themes. This was consistent with the comparative case study design presented in Chapter 4 which, as noted above, improves the transferability and dependability of research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Drawing on the tracer issue, four case sites were selected on the basis of two comparative dimensions: hospital type (public-voluntary/public-HSE), and strategy direction of the LMRS (hub/spoke). Table 6.2 provides an overview of expressions in each of the four case sites.

Table 6.2: Expressions of Workplace Industrial Relations Conflict - Comparative Analysis

Expressions	Case 1		Case 2		Case 3		Case 4	
	Participants	Refs.	Participants	Refs.	Participants	Refs.	Participants	Refs.
Absenteeism	10	122	10	138	8	153	10	141
Annual Leave	3	3	10	30	5	26	6	12
Neglect (-)	6	20	7	27	5	13	4	11
Quitting (-)	3	12	10	42	6	20	8	29
Resistance	11	103	12	243	8	240	10	303
Sabotage (-)	2	3	8	21	5	21	4	6
Strike (-)	6	36	8	73	8	120	8	88
Tardiness	2	4	7	14	6	31	2	3
Voice	12	296	12	347	8	345	10	347
Withdrawal	11	78	11	276	8	116	10	185

As before, Table 6.2 presents the number of participants<sup>44</sup> and references for each expression<sup>45</sup>. Taking the four cases together, Table 6.2 demonstrates that the *types* of expressions used are consistent across each of the case sites. While there are differences in *how much* an expression was referenced - or *how many* participants described each expression - participants identified the same expressions across the four cases. Further, participants described the use of these expressions in a consistent manner. While this finding reduces the risk of an outlier case and signals potential for transferability of findings, it may be indicative of cohesion in the Irish healthcare context, or the Medlab context.

There was consistency of expression between public-voluntary (cases 1 & 4) and public-HSE (cases 2 & 3) hospitals where the same types of expressions were described. This may be related to

<sup>44</sup> Case 1 - 12 Participants; Case 2 - 12 Participants; Case 3 - 8 Participants; Case 4 - 10 Participants. Cited data is provided using pseudonyms rather than case numbers to prevent in-case identification of participants based on number of participants.

<sup>45</sup> The numbers of references or participants should not be taken as indicative of significance of any particular expression. Consistent with the interpretive approach employed, the purpose here is not to identify the most used or most described expression. This Table illustrates that the expressions reviewed are grounded in the data, and that each of these expressions is evident in each of the four case sites.

declining autonomy in public voluntary hospitals (Donoghue *et al.*, 1999; O'Ferrell, 2000) which is arguably exacerbated by recent resource constraints.

It was thought that focusing on case sites facing redeployment - as an identified theme of IR conflict in Irish hospitals (Cowman & Keating, 2013) would facilitate the exploration of IR conflict in the workplace. The HSE sponsor informed the doctoral researcher of the predicted designations for hub and spoke labs. However, as noted in Chapter 4, a number of other large scale change initiatives in the Irish healthcare context posed delays to full strategy implementation. While data collection was delayed to allow for the announcement of the hub labs<sup>46</sup>, the announcement had not been made at the time of data collection. While there was evidence of leaks and speculation as to the hub lab designations in each of the case sites, there was no clarity and much cynicism due to extensive delays. While some participants were concerned about the future of the LMRS, some were entirely unaware of plans for redeployment. Thus, it would be imprudent to draw conclusions regarding consistency or otherwise across this comparative dimension. A Union Representative ( $\gamma$ ) commented on the uncertainty around laboratory reconfiguration:

"So while there would have been a drive to stick to a game plan... say, three or four years ago, now for whatever reason [reconfiguration has] kind of lost momentum to some extent. Now that doesn't mean to say re-configuration won't happen... the problem for members - is they simply don't know what the fall-out is going to be... I suppose they've gone beyond sort of speculating at this stage to any great extent because it can only be conjecture right now".

While hub laboratories have yet to be announced, the tracer issue acted as a valuable context in which IR conflict emerged. Specifically, the extended working day and revised on-call payments were notable motivators of IR conflict expressions and allowed participants to focus on their experiences of IR conflict.

However, the substance of IR conflict in this healthcare setting was broader than anticipated. As noted in Chapter 5, data was collected in the wake of PSA 1 and during negotiations of PSA 2. Thus, in this high pressure context, the substance of IR conflict extended far beyond the LMRS. This may also contribute to consistency in the IR conflict expressions described.

In order to address the first research question, how do employees express workplace IR conflict, this section provided an overview of the expressions evident in the case data. Both aggregate and cross-case analysis indicate the wide variety of expressions of IR conflict in the workplace. Consistent with the exploratory and descriptive orientation of the study, attention now turns to describing the expressions evident in the case data. These expressions will then form the

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<sup>46</sup> Due to practical research considerations, only a finite delay to data collection was permitted.

empirical base for the following chapters in this research dissertation. At this juncture expressions are clustered into inductively-derived response categories.

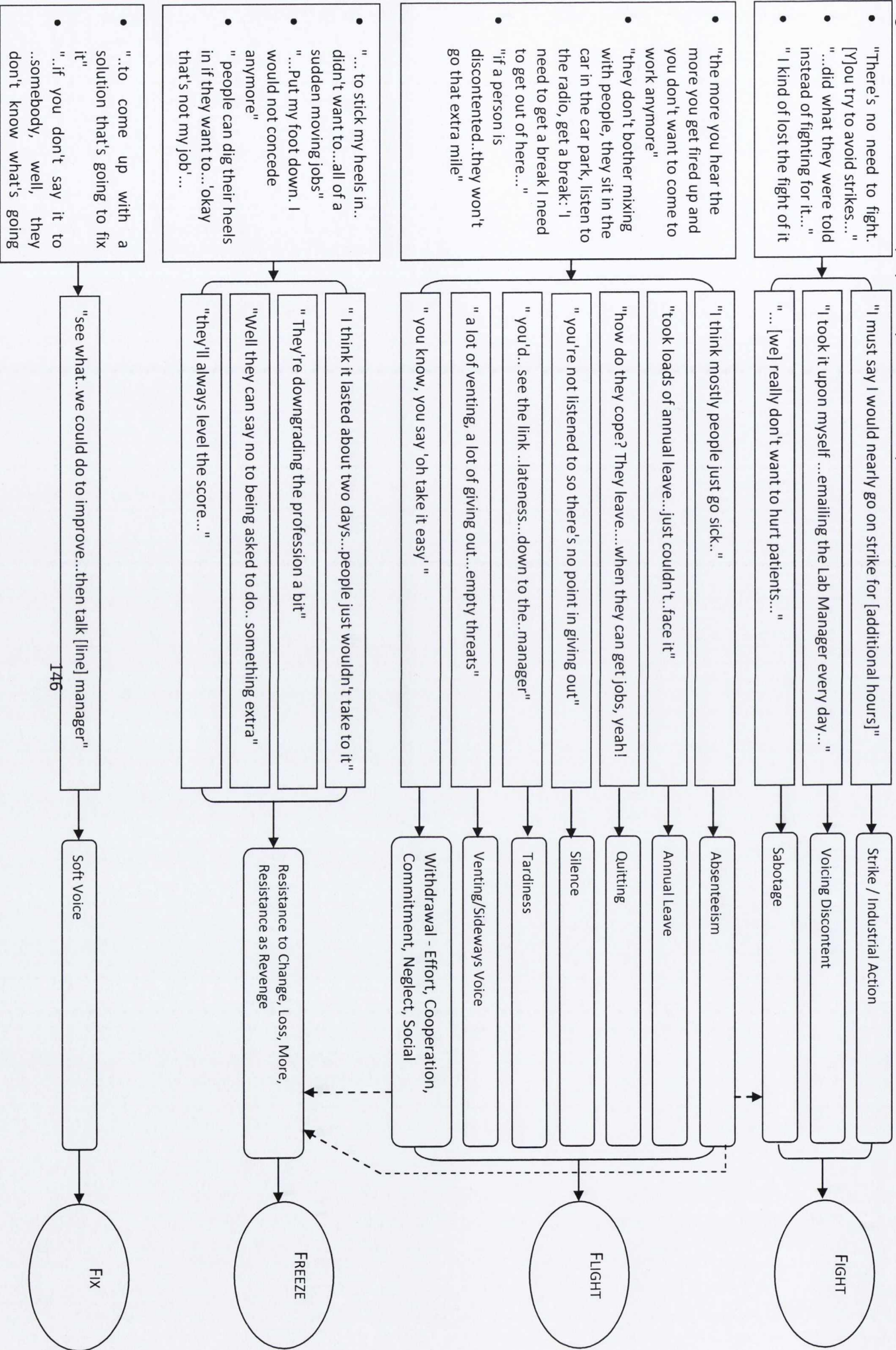
### **6.3 CLUSTERING EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

There have been previous attempts in the literature to group expressions into response categories Exit-Voice (Hirschman, 1970), ELVN (Farrell, 1983, Rusbult & Lowery, 1985). However, the ELVN framework has limitations: (i) it is not inclusive of the variety of IR conflict expressions, and (ii) does not apply to the nuance of IR conflict where the employment relationship is subject to significant power asymmetries (Blyton & Turnbull, 1994;) and interdependence (Sexton, 1996). Consequently, ELVN, and the addition of resistance, was identified as a 'placeholder' (Maxwell, 2013) in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. Drawing on the integrated data analysis strategy (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), aggregate themes rooted in the data and participant experience, four response categories emerged inductively from the data: Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fix. Expressions are clustered within these responses. In addition, based on the empirical descriptions provided by participants, some expressions are unbundled and extended.

A data structure illustrating the thematic derivation process is illustrated in Figure 6.1. The data structure, as advocated by Gioia *et al.* (2012), demonstrates that these themes are grounded in the data. On the left are excerpts of coded data, or units of meaning. These units are interpreted using inductive and deductive analysis as expressions of IR conflict in the centre of Figure 6.1. Based on the expressions and descriptions underpinning them, links are made to four employee responses to workplace IR conflict. The arrows are not causal but rather demonstrate the progression of interpretive analysis which involved inductive and deductive cycles between data and existing literature. Dashed arrows are included where the case evidence suggests expressions are used to pursue more than one employee response. However, due to the complexity and individuality of employees, there may be more overlap than evidenced in these cases.



Figure 6.1: Data Structure - Employee Responses to Workplace IR Conflict



When describing IR conflict and their use of expressions, participants used the term fight to capture expressions involving an active challenge to management<sup>47</sup>. In addition, they explained that in responding to or coping with IR conflict, they often need to escape the workplace or pull away; dig their heels in; or fix the underlying issues of IR conflict in the workplace. These categories emerged inductively from the data. However, data analysis involved iterative cycles between data and existing theory. It was found that the best match for these categories fell beyond IR or organisational literatures<sup>48</sup>. Rather, theory from physiology, psychology and psychiatry domains were identified as valuable. 'Fight or Flight' theory, coined by Cannon (Schmidt *et al.*, 2008), is used to consider physiological responses in conditions of acute stress or threat. In short, we stay and fight or we withdraw. Within the fields of psychology and psychiatry 'Fight or Flight' has been extended to consider freeze where, facing acute stress, we stay still or 'play dead' (Bracha *et al.*, 2004; Schmidt *et al.*, 2008). These psycho-physiological responses are consistent with workplace IR conflict which, hinging on the frustration of important goals, can be conceptualised in terms of stress (Fried, 1993) or threat. Employees faced with dissatisfaction in the employment relationship choose between fighting management on the substance of IR conflict, or withdrawing from the workplace and/or employment relationship. Alternatively, they can seek to halt the dynamic of the employment relationship and maintain the status quo. Fix emerged as the final response category where participants described a problem-solving approach to IR conflict.

## FIGHT

Most closely related to the classics of industrial action, the fight response involves an active challenge to management. While not necessarily articulated or explicit, employees described fighting the managerial prerogative in a number of ways - some more visible than others. Notable expressions in this response category include strikes and industrial action; voicing discontent; and sabotage.

### Strike

The strike is considered in existing literature as "a stoppage of work by a group of workers to express a conflict" (Turkington, 1975:31) and "the traditional yardstick of workplace relations" (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005:373). Despite direct questions on the strike, participants focused

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<sup>47</sup> Participants often used the term fight when describing a change in their response to IR conflict where they, having lost the will to 'fight', moved toward other more passive responses and expressions. This is considered in Chapter 7.

<sup>48</sup> Since the categories were inductively derived, and fall beyond the remit of IR and organisational literatures, the categories were not examined in the literature review (Ch.2) of this research dissertation.

their description on non-strike expressions of IR conflict. This may stem from interview emphasis on the participant experience - where the use of the strike expression is uncommon:

"Yeah, I think it's going to be difficult. I think it's going to - I've never been on strike in 33 years, I think that's kind of unusual. Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ )

In the main, participants articulated a strong anti-strike stance. However, some participants warned that the situation was at breaking point. Some support for strike action arose with regard to the revised on-call payments under the LMRS, and specifically the delay in some hospitals regarding payment of the loss of earnings compensation approved by the Labour Court. In addition, a view emerged during the PSA 2 negotiations that Medlab employees had 'had enough'. This view was linked to a perceived inequity in the implementation of PSA 1 where Medlab employees were 'hit more' than their public sector counterparts:

"Well we're talking of industrial action. This has only blown up this week now, there will be industrial action if they don't pay because it's illegal, they're meant to pay us" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"I do feel we've been hard done by as a group because we had an awful lot to give under Croke Park 1. We've started the extended working day, 8 to 8 and Monday to Friday and now if they're going to push that to rolling us into Saturday as well, I would absolutely go on strike for that, because I think I'm not prepared to work routinely on Saturday until my colleagues [go beyond] Monday to Friday [9-5] (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"They've got on with it, you know, but I think we're hitting saturation level and I think basically it could burst open, you know" (A Laboratory Manager,  $\beta$ ).

While some support was evident, participants explained that if strike action was pursued it would be an extraordinary stance for the Medlab group to adopt, where strike action would take "an awful lot" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ). Despite the heightened level of discontent relating to non-payment of compensation and impending PSA 2 negotiations, participants were largely anti-strike. A Medical Lab Aide ( $\alpha$ ) stated:

"At the moment I couldn't see myself going on strike for any reason, I can't really see anything coming up that would make me go on strike. I'd say the worst thing I would do would be possibly a go-slow, like still turn up and do the [job]".

This participant discussed the strike response in the context of other workplace issues where employees speaking with one another will say "if this carries on, strike", but dismissed such comments as "empty threats". Many participants identified strike action as a "last resort" (Union,  $\alpha$ ), and a strategy to be avoided. The idea of strike action elicited a response of laughter, disbelief, or fear. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"... I think it would take [a lot] - I can't imagine a strike to be honest... People actually laugh about it if there's a strike mentioned. 'We wouldn't do that! Nooo!'" [laughs] (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"What do I do before that? Take a lot of long walks or quick walks or - what do you do before you go on strike? You'll do almost anything not to go on strike" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

Despite the focus of the literature, strike was one of many expressions evident in the data. In this regard the findings depart from our understanding of workplace IR conflict. Participants focused their attention on describing non-strike expressions of IR conflict in the workplace and articulated a significant reluctance around the use of strike action. This confirms that the importance of the strike has been overstated. In line with this view, participants presented a number of rationales against strike action: the costs versus benefits of strikes; a lack of solidarity; and the view that - despite significant discontent in the employment relationship - strike was not necessary. These issues are explored further in Chapter 7.

### **Voicing Discontent**

Voice, introduced by Hirschman (1970), as a response to decline has been defined and redefined in contemporary literature to include ideas and opinions (Bagchi, 2011); silence and sideways voice (Budd, 2014). However, participants drew distinctions between these behaviours. Therefore, voice is unbundled<sup>49</sup> where voicing discontent located in the fight response is - in line with Hirschman - hinged on the communication of discontent to management.

Participants explained that employees complain to express IR conflict. Consistent with Harlos (2001), voice mechanisms described by participants ranged from informal to formal. In line with Hebdon and Noh (2013), a progressive approach to formality was described where an informal approach is preferred at least in the first instance. These dynamics are illustrated in the following quotes:

"I mean, they verbalise their complaints for the most part" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

"Like, it would be casual now... Like, we don't go straight for, like, the big guns, like, all the time, do you know that kind of way?" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

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<sup>49</sup> Other forms of voice evident in the data included soft voice; silence; and sideways voice or venting. These behaviours were identified by participants as expressions of workplace IR conflict. However, they are situated in the Flight response.

A detailed example of voice as an expression of IR conflict was provided by a Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ) who explained that the laboratory, in their view, was dangerously understaffed. This participant explains that they made several attempts to complain informally to management:

"... we lost so many staff and management weren't listening - as in the Lab Manager wasn't listening or you'd go to [laboratory manager] and it was like [they had] only heard it for the first time every single time you went to talk to [laboratory manager]" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

This employee, fearful of the situation and its potential consequences, pursued the issue more aggressively, opting for a more formal approach to voicing discontent. In this example, the participant attributed the frustration of the Laboratory Manager to the written record of the complaint rather than the complaint itself:

"I took it upon myself to [laughs] - I was emailing the lab manager every day... saying I couldn't stand over results that are being released because there was meant to be more people on and that you're doing ten things at once. So to cover myself I was [writing] that to [lab manager], so [the laboratory manager] didn't like that and... got me to come in because it was in writing. [Lab manager] didn't like it because it was in writing... well [laboratory manager] said... [laboratory manager] is a very friendly kind of, you know 'oh you can come talk to me there's no need to be writing it down' so to me that's [laboratory manager] doesn't want it in writing".

More formal approaches were typically described in the context of the grievance procedure. While, in line with HSE policies, all case sites had in place a formal grievance procedure: an informal and local approach to dispute resolution was encouraged in each of the organisations. A HR/IR Manager ( $\theta$ ) described a preference for resolving issues of workplace discontent informally, however it was recognised that some issues - particularly those with knock-on implications - required HR, and perhaps national involvement. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"We would always try and resolve it informally, if at all possible – say, if it is between a manager and an employee, we try and bring them together, try and resolve it informally before... we have to go down the grievance [road]..." (HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

"Normally, a grievance procedure would be sorted out locally... Well, for something that big... that had a major - would have major potential knock-on effects as well" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

Despite the preference for informal voice, grievance procedures were described as a means through which employees expressed IR conflict. While some participants explained that this was a main route for aggrieved employees, others held the view that grievance procedures were not used by many in the Medlab group. In addition, one HR/IR manager ( $\theta$ ) proffered the view that an

increase in activity in this regard signalled an increase in IR conflict in the workplace. Contrasting viewpoints are provided below.

"Mainly, I think they express it through our grievance procedure. We are strong advocates of if you have an issue that you go through the proper procedures to escalate that with a view to resolving it. So the grievance procedure is probably in terms of - the stats that I keep in terms of employee relations is probably one of the most utilised pieces that we have, which I think is a positive sign" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"Well, we have - I'm probably going down the same road now as earlier, but we have like grievance procedure here in [hospital]. Not many people that I know have gone down that road..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

In addition to formal workplace grievance procedures, the use of national level IR machinery was described as an expression of IR conflict. One HR/IR manager ( $\beta$ ) held the view that a decline in local budgetary discretion, arising from resource constraints, was redirecting disputes typically addressed at the local level towards the national arena. In contrast, a union representative ( $\gamma$ ) explained that many employees were reluctant to pursue resolution through IR institutions due to a perception of declining efficacy, and the fear of media coverage. These competing views are illustrated below.

"Now we don't have that budgetary control or even kind of any latitude in determining what - what a settlement might be... I think as a consequence has tended to... not force exactly but put more people into the industrial relations arena as a way of resolving disputes" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

"To be honest, I think if there is any conflict, people either put up with it or try and work it out with management because more and more you're seeing the unions bringing stuff to the Labour Court and it's getting thrown out of the Labour Court, so I think people are kind of going... 'God'... and there's always a big scare factor as well, if the public out there hear how much you're earning... 'Oh, if it gets on the papers how much you earn on-call'... That was a big one that was kind of trying to scaremonger people into not stepping it up..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

Thus, the data supports the idea that voicing discontent can emerge in both informal and formal ways (Harlos, 2001) and that both of these forms are used to express IR conflict in the workplace. However, the findings indicate a preference for informal and direct forms of voicing discontent.

Luchak (2003) explains that voicing discontent can also be classified in terms of the route taken to management where direct voice arises when employees communicate themselves to management, and representative voice arises where a third party communicates employee interests. Participants articulated a strong preference for direct voice. While some proffered the view that representation was required it was explained that a direct, non-union approach was

most common. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ) outlined the steps to voicing discontent. Recourse to the union is a notable absence in this account:

"... I think if someone is unhappy with how something went or how something is being done, they would report to the Chief in the lab, so each individual lab has a Chief, and discuss with them how they might try and remedy it. If the grievance is with the Chief themselves, I guess they'd come [to]... a Senior... or come to the Lab Manager and I guess... you could always go to HR"

"So I suppose they have - IMPACT is open to them... But it's mainly a direct route" (Clerical Manager,  $\beta$ ).

A Laboratory Manager ( $\theta$ ) noted that in most cases employees - on an individual basis - tend to "stand up for themselves" rather than relying on union representation. Consistent with the progressive approach to formality outlined above, employees described direct voice in the first instance where representative voice - engaging the Trade Union - was considered an escalation of the dispute. In this regard employees explained that good relations dictate the use of direct voice first and foremost - if not to the exclusion of union voice. This process was described by a Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ):

"I don't think so, I think, like, I'd still probably go to my own managers first, like, I wouldn't by pass them and go straight to the union and whatever like that if something did happen but I would probably have it in the back of my head that it probably will be going [too] far".

Direct voice was often channelled via the command structure where employees complained to their immediate line manager who relayed communication to senior and top level laboratory management. This was described in the context of the LMRS and the extended working day:

"Again, I think it just came through, it came through actually the staff in one particular department talking to their immediate line manager, shall we say. Then [Line Manager] just came to me and [Line Manager] said... 'Look it, they're still not happy with whatever'... So I said... 'Look it, we'll call a halt so, we'll get them all together again'" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Indicative of the employee preference for direct voice, an employee recounted an experience where management's response to a problem was to advise them to contact the union. However this employee felt that this in and of itself was inconsistent with positive relations:

"... one of the comments [from management] was 'oh get your union to do something about it' but it's not that way management should behave towards their staff... we're all supposed to be on the same side delivering a service"(Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

In this example the *employee* felt that the union entity was intruding on their employment relationship, and was being used by management to avoid addressing the issues raised by employees directly. This departs from the traditional pluralist view of industrial relations and is more closely aligned to the unitarist assumptions of HR.

Despite this example, managerial participants also articulated a preference for direct voice. A HR/IR Manager ( $\gamma$ ) encouraged managers to be 'open' to direct voice and listen to employee complaints. While no rationale was made explicit, direct voice is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of HR where non-union dispute resolution is favoured. A Laboratory Manager ( $\theta$ ) described their experience when employees brought the union representative to a meeting regarding additional on-call staffing. This example, provided below, illustrates an interesting dynamic regarding the blurred relations between workplace management, employees, and union representatives:

"I think they felt they had to bring the union rep. I can't understand - like I suppose they didn't feel maybe that I had maybe plugged it enough, I don't really know. Like, I had shown them the letters that I had sent to the hospital manager and his reply, but I suppose maybe they just felt that it might be better with – have just more weight to it if the union rep was there" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

In this example, the Laboratory Manager acts as an advocate to hospital management for increased laboratory resources. When this approach is unsuccessful, the group of employees request the presence of a union representative. This is confusing to the Laboratory Manager who identifies with, and has advocated for, their subordinates. Thus, the seeming loyalty between workplace management and employees - and this preference for direct voice - creates complexity regarding the use of representative voice.

Despite the preferences for direct voice, participants also described the use of representative voice in the form of Trade Union representation and legal representation. Some participants explained that employees 'fight' through their Trade Union. These views are illustrated below.

"They [employees] come to us [union], they fight through us, they use us to go and talk and seek and get clarification and fight, like loss of earnings, we had to fight for that" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

"I suppose I'd react through the unions, I mean I pay money to the unions, I pay my subscriptions and that's - their particular job is to represent our views so I would let my unions know how I feel about it through my agent or whatever and I'd expect my views to be represented" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

While some described the use of the union representative voice, they also described dissatisfaction with the union - as distinct from the employer. This dynamic highlights the



tripartite nature of the employment relationship; while unions exist to represent the interests of employees, those interests - in line with multiple stakeholder theory - are not necessarily aligned at all times. Union representatives across the cases explained that the union often get complaints regarding the 'deal struck'. This, perhaps indicative of damaged trust relations between unions and members (Rittau & Dundon, 2011), has serious implications for mobilisation in this setting (Edwards, 2004). However, this dynamic was considered by union representatives as misplaced anger toward the employer. However, some employees explained that they accepted the employer role in reducing costs and protecting the viability of the broader health service but questioned the outcomes of union negotiations.

"So HSE - when it comes to – funny enough – when it comes to Croke Park and stuff, it's the executive get the hammering... 'Why did you do this? Why did you let them? Why did you say yes when we said no?'... I said... 'You can't please everybody'... it is the HSE, but they can't shout at them, so they shout at me" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

"I [said] it to my Chief which would kind of be my line manager and [line manager] tried to do something... They [the union] didn't realise that this was part of the [agreement]... they couldn't do anything about it. They'd signed the Croke Park agreement" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

There seemed to be confusion amongst participants regarding the role of the union. Some employees considered Trade Union representatives as too 'pro-management' and as such the union representative voice was undermined. Instead of a representative voice, employees focused on the role of the union as an information source. Union representatives articulated a complex position regarding their role where some considered themselves as a mediator between management and employees - rather than representative of employees.

"... the union rep at the time was someone that was pro-management, so I felt I couldn't go to the union... because the union rep... was being a union rep to bolster their potential for promotion, not necessarily there to fight for the rights of staff... and was also, I suppose, like I said, pro-management more than pro-staff and therefore I didn't feel that that would be a line that I could follow" (Basic Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"Well, we probably wouldn't contact them personally anyway. They're the ones that just... they notify us about the different things. They'd give us updates on what's happening and what's not happening. I don't really contact them" (Administrative Staff,  $\theta$ ).

Legal representative voice was also pursued by some aggrieved employees or former employees as an expression of workplace IR conflict. It was explained that this course of action was most often in relation to a managerial instruction deemed beyond the remit of their job description. HR/IR Managers noted that while not the most common voice mechanism or expression of IR conflict, there have been a few recent instances which, in one laboratory, precipitated a change in local policy:

"... one of the employees engaged a solicitor, the HSE engaged a solicitor, so it was going over and back and over and back... whereas actually after that then we had another incident where an employee went and got a solicitor... We wrote back a couple of lines. 'This is an employee of the hospital, we will obviously deal with all the issues that have arisen under the local HR policies'" (HR/IR, θ).

Another HR/IR Manager (γ) described a scenario where an aggrieved employee opted for legal voice following use of union voice. Interesting in this example is the employee shift from union representation to legal representation.

"... [the employee] dealt with us through [their] Trade Union... we ended up in the Labour Court where [the employee] had engaged... a barrister and a solicitor... they were looking for was about €50,000... I'd say they weren't well experienced in the Labour Court... we settled for €5,000 in full and final settlement of all claims in relation to that, but on the basis that the person would be cooperating with the change of practice that we had put in place... [the employee] probably could have got a better outcome. Or had [the employee] kept [their] Union, you know" (IR/HR, γ).

This participant commented that had the employee retained Union representation they may have had a better outcome. The experience of legal counsel in the Labour Court and the employment context is also noted. The emphasis placed on direct voice combined with dissatisfaction toward Trade Unions, and the use of legal representation as an alternative create interesting dynamics which differ from the traditional understanding of voice (Benson, 2000).

The data, providing support for Hirschman (1970), confirms the use of voice to communicate discontent. While the IR literature focuses on union voice (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Benson, 2000), the case data departed from this traditional view. A strong preference was articulated for informal and direct voice where participants described a reluctance to engage the union representative voice, and a dissatisfaction with Trade Unions. Further, in line with the juridification of the employment relationship (Browne, 1994; Dickens & Hall, 2003) and the increasingly individualised nature of employment legislation (Scheuer, 2006), legal representation was evident as a form of representative voice. This poses questions for Trade Unions and the suggesting a potentially diminishing role of union voice in the case data. Nevertheless, this context has 100% coverage. Therefore, non-union expression of workplace IR conflict coincides with, rather than supplants, unionised expression. This is considered further in Chapter 7.

### **Sabotage**

Analoui (1995) explains that sabotage is a multi-stranded phenomenon involving destruction in the workplace. In contrast to neglect, sabotage is active and deliberate destruction in or relating to the workplace. In the case data, sabotage was discussed with incredulity on the part of

participants and deep concern for the patient. As noted in Chapter 4, one participant became notably upset when discussing the potential use of sabotage in this healthcare context. However, while the patient was never the target, there was some evidence suggesting that employees caused intention harm to the functioning of the workplace.

"... we would have had our suspicions that there was some sabotage... an instruction that was issued and then... 'I was too busy to do that, I didn't get round to it'... And then it would have had huge consequences if this work wasn't done. Yes, leaving work undone. Maybe hiding work when they're not there so nobody knew that the work had to be done..." (HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

There was also some evidence of property 'deviance' (Robinson & Bennet, 1995) in the case data. In one instance an employee, following a dispute with management, became aggressive in the workplace and threw empty test tubes against a wall, while another example involved an employee punching a piece of machinery. In the absence of any particular destructive act, participants noted the use of aggressive emotions in the expression of workplace IR conflict and specifically banging small items in the immediate work vicinity. This is consistent with Taylor and Walton (1971 cited in Eldridge, 1973) and the frustration form of sabotage.

While there was some evidence to suggest pilferage of stationery and tea/coffee, these were provided as speculative explanations for the organisational withdrawal of these supplies. Some employees considered absenteeism and withdrawal of cooperation as forms of sabotage where these behaviours were used to purposefully disrupt the workplace. However these were limited, and as evidenced by the reference to inverted commas in the quote below, participants seemed sceptical regarding this conceptualisation of sabotage.

*"[pause]* I know the one that went down like a sledge hammer recently was that tea and coffee would no longer be supplied for the staff room here and that went down very badly, but it's cost cutting, you know, because if you duplicate tea, butter, milk, jam, coffee, it's available subsidised cheaply in the canteen and people can go up there to have it, but they're not giving it out round the hospital any more. Part of it, I'd say, was that people were taking stuff home" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"Yes... there would certainly have been... certainly [in] my experience - when I was here before, there was a lot of stuff like that, you could call it sabotage in inverted commas, you know, just people being difficult and uncooperative and, you know, not coming in or exceeding the absenteeism, but they've cut down a lot on that too" (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Analoui (1995), writing from an OB perspective, and many IR theorists (Turkington, 1975; Edwards, 1992; Gall & Hebdon, 2008) identify pilfering and disruptive practices as forms of sabotage. However, there was limited evidence that participants viewed or pursued these acts in

this way. Further - and more broadly - participants stressed that employees in healthcare would not pursue sabotage due to the potentially devastating impact on the patient. In this regard, the role of the patient is significant. Either the patient prevents sabotage in this context - or cognitive dissonance prevents participants from considering their behaviour as sabotage.

In review, the Fight response incorporates an array of active expressions of workplace IR conflict - some more overt than others. The strike expression is the epitome of the fight response. However, as demonstrated there was limited support for this expression. This is considered further in Chapter 7. The voice expression is unbundled across the four threat responses. Rather than including the varieties of voice that are more passive in character, this author is concerned with the communication of discontent to management. As demonstrated the channel of communication may be direct or representative. Voicing discontent is not solely within the purview of union entities and may involve direct communication between employee(s) and management, and/or legal representation. Similarly, voicing discontent may be formal or informal and as such can include organisational grievance procedures, third party resolution and state-provided dispute resolution machinery. Similar to strike action, there was questionable support for Trade Unions in the data. Sabotage is also included as a fight expression where in contrast to the comparably passive neglect expression, sabotage requires active destruction in, or relating to, the workplace. While sabotage is an active fight response, it may - due to its concealed nature - be limited in its visibility.

## FLIGHT

The flight response, rooted in self-preservation, involves retreat. The case data showed that employees pursued the flight response through physical, cognitive, and affective withdrawal from the workplace in an effort to avoid workplace IR conflict or re-balance exchange relations. Expressions within this category evident in the case data included absenteeism; annual leave; quitting, silence, sideways voice or venting, tardiness, withdrawal of effort, cooperation, commitment and social withdrawal and neglect as the withdrawal of care.

### **Absenteeism**

Absenteeism, as unauthorised absence from the workplace, is often listed as an expression of IR conflict in existing literature (Barbash, 1980; Edwards & Scullion, 1982; Edwards, 1986; Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Belanger & Edwards, 2013). As noted in Chapter 3, there is significant documentary evidence of absenteeism in the Irish healthcare sector (Health Service

Executive, 2012, 2013<sup>50</sup>). The HSE has pursued, and continues to pursue, a number of measures to manage employee attendance in healthcare (Managing Attendance, HSE, 2014). At the time of data collection there were a number of changes to its absenteeism policy. Describing these changes, a clerical manager ( $\alpha$ ) noted the employee reaction:

"Yeah, at the moment there's issues going on... and this would be hospital-wide... the sick leave changing... the HSE has changed the sick leave entitlement... there's a bit of friction there at the moment".

Participants, employees and management alike, described absenteeism as an expression of dissatisfaction in the employment relationship. A Senior Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ), when asked to recount expressions of IR conflict, responded abruptly with "[a]bsenteeism." This employee described [their] own use of absenteeism to express workplace IR conflict:

"Sick leave, complaints I suppose to - through the bullying procedure but I think mostly people just go sick... Well, if I don't feel up to coming into work I'll certainly take a day off sick".

A further example was provided by a HR/IR manager ( $\alpha$ ) who identified absenteeism as a way in which employees 'push back' when dissatisfied in the workplace or within the employment relationship. This participant described their experience of absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict, in the course of their role in absence management:

"... they can simply not come in, a day off, sick leave. It could be long term sick, you know, put in a cert for stress... I've witnessed some of it in terms of the absence management side".

While research has been conducted to quantify absenteeism in order to indicate IR conflict (Gall & Hebdon, 2008), difficulties arise due to "the many things absence can mean" (Luchak & Gellatly, 1996:94). Many authors in IR and beyond note that absenteeism can be involuntary, arising from illness, or voluntary where employees purposely absent themselves from the workplace (Bean, 1975; De Boer *et al.*, 2002; Behrens, 2008; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2010). However existing literature explains that it is difficult to distinguish between these forms (Bean, 1975; Behrens, 2007). While some participants noted this challenge, others were confident in their ability to identify each form. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

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<sup>50</sup> Absenteeism data is provided according to employee groups. However, Medlab employees are recorded within a broader category. In addition, the purpose of this study is not to establish the most used expression of workplace IR conflict. Rather, the study seeks to explore *how* IR conflict is expressed, and *how/why* these expressions are used.

"... you can never know if it is actually a fake sick day or not, but... if someone was pissed off with something, they might just not come in the next day... call in sick" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"No [it is not difficult to identify], not in my personal experience and I suppose I might sound quite definite about that... "(HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

### Involuntary Absenteeism

Involuntary absenteeism is unauthorised non-attendance at work arising due to illness. Existing literature explains that the most likely cause of absenteeism is sickness (Bean, 1975; De Boer *et al.*, 2002). This was acknowledged by participants who explained that "...people are sick... people get sick" (Phlebotomist,  $\alpha$ ). In addition to sickness, the data provided support for existing literature on the links between stress, involuntary absenteeism, and unfairness (De Boer *et al.*, 2002) or IR conflict (Fried, 1993; Muir, 1994). Participants explained that issues of discontent in the workplace caused workplace stress which resulted in illness and involuntary absenteeism. A Medical Lab Aide ( $\gamma$ ) provided an example pertaining to a colleague who, experiencing stress relating to understaffing and workload, began to suffer a series of throat infections:

"[colleague] is getting quite sick actually with throat infections and that... the short *staffness* could lead to people being more pressurised and then the feeling in work and that could lead to absenteeism".

Participants cited an array of issues including bullying, workload, working hours, loss of earnings and the non-availability of promotional opportunities as stressors in the workplace. In keeping with the economic context and the international trend toward work intensification in healthcare (Weber, 2011), participants highlighted workplace stress arising from workload, and – providing support for Russell and McGinnity (2014) – described pressure in the workplace. The quotations which follow reflect these issues.

"... Absenteeism, yeah, I've seen one or two people that have come in and said 'I cannot face tomorrow' but I think that's from weariness or tiredness" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

Loss of pay and the consequent impact on personal finances was identified by participants as a common stressor. Other IR issues giving rise to workplace stress and involuntary absenteeism included unpalatable news from management; disciplinary action; and individual grievances. The links between workplace IR conflict, workplace stress and involuntary absenteeism are illustrated in the following quotes:

"... [S]ome staff experiencing some financial difficulties, that can obviously lead on to stress related illness... I've often seen ... where staff have been redeployed... they didn't

like where they were being redeployed to and... they would call into the manager's office later in the day and say... 'I've an awful headache, I'm going home'... and maybe be out for a week afterwards, that sort of thing" (HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

"There are a number, I suppose, you might find an employee who's uncooperative. You might find an employee who suddenly had a good attendance record might suddenly find a level of sickness or absenteeism that might be a cause for concern... and you might see it on the medical cert where it might be work related stress might appear on it" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

These quotes also signal ambiguity regarding IR conflict, workplace stress and involuntary absenteeism. Since stress is not a visible condition and the motives of absenteeism can be both involuntary and voluntary, attributing involuntary absenteeism to workplace stress is challenging and necessarily a function of interpretation and interactions between parties. This is also true for identifying voluntary absenteeism arising from IR conflict.

#### Voluntary Absenteeism

Voluntary absenteeism relates to an unauthorised absence from the workplace for reasons other than illness (Bean, 1975). While many participants identified voluntary absenteeism as a way of expressing IR conflict (see below), others explained that it was not a concern in the immediate context. However, data supported the view that employees 'go sick' where the view that voluntary absenteeism is an expression of IR conflict was held by employees; Trade Union representatives; and management alike. The quotations below provide an insight into this.

"Generally, there is a strong sense of responsibility on the part of people, you know, there's - I can think of exceptions, yes. Actually, now that I think about it, I can definitely think of one or two situations where you probably could say these people were absenting themselves [due to IR conflict]" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

"I would look - I would look significantly at absenteeism levels [as an indicator of IR conflict]" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

A Trade Union representative ( $\theta$ ) confirmed the use of voluntary absenteeism as a "classic tool" in IR conflicts. However, this participant described no union involvement in this expression. As noted, existing literature explains that the identification of voluntary absenteeism is difficult (Bean, 1975; Luckak & Gellatly, 1996). However, HR managers were clear on the indicators of voluntary absenteeism. Indicators included patterned absence; self-certified absenteeism; unauthorised absence following or preceding an authorised absence; and absences following disputes.

"[some groups] have an appalling sick leave record, it's almost like a thumbs up to the organisation... I think you look from a kind of a trend analysis perspective... we have very kind of robust absence stats... and then you'll know from working with individuals too,

you know, you'll know from - you'll know from your kind of day-to-day knowledge of the working relationship in the said departments where it's coming from... there are some patterns... some of them are very obvious... some people might have a Monday off after the weekend or might have a Friday, and it's nearly always... around the rest period" (HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

Self-certified sick leave was described by participants with a degree of scepticism where these absences were considered by some as lacking legitimacy. A view emerged that the number of self-certified days allowable under HSE policy was used as an extension of employee entitlements. This voluntary absenteeism was considered a reaction to "bad management" (Union Representative,  $\beta$ ) or conflict at the workplace level. This provoked a change in HR policy in one of the cases:

"I remember when I started working in payroll actually a number of years ago, we would regularly get phone calls to say 'how many more days have I left to take?', you know, then we stopped... 'we cannot give out that information, if you're concerned about your sick leave or you want to query your sick leave entitlements, discuss it with your managers'... because they'd ring up, they'd bypass the manager, ring us up and say... 'how many have I got left?'" (IR/HR,  $\theta$ ).

In addition, the use of certified absenteeism was discussed as an indicator of voluntary absenteeism. Participants explained that the availability of medical certificates allowed employees to use certified sickness to voluntarily absent themselves from the workplace:

"Because if you get [into a dispute] with somebody and you're a bit stressed, you go and ask the doctor for a sick cert. I see that a lot, not so much here... it [certified absenteeism] has been a tool! And if they've been annoyed with somebody in management, they may take a week sick, you know what I mean... They get a sick cert, screw you, here's a sick cert, I'm going off [sick]" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

"... there's a couple of people who feel that, because they're in a union now or because they cry sick to their doctor all the time with stress, that they can get away with stuff and, in actual fact, they can, because they're covered, you know. I'd say definitely absenteeism, yes. I'd say there are people who go absent because they get frustrated, yeah. That's their way of dealing with it [workplace IR conflict]" (Administrative Staff,  $\gamma$ ).

A Phlebotomy manager ( $\beta$ ) provided a detailed example of certified voluntary absence concerning an employee "on the long-term sick". This participant noted the refusal of the employee to attend occupational health and the inconsistencies in medical certificates supplied as indicative of voluntary absenteeism. While this participant described significant dissatisfaction with [their] subordinate regarding this issue, they subsequently explained that they themselves would pursue voluntary absenteeism - long term sick leave - in response to changes under the LMRS where long term sick leave would necessitate medical certification.



"I don't know, I'll have to see what will be open to me to see if I can but I think I would have to probably look down the lines of retirement and going out on the long term sick or something I just literally couldn't because I would physically not be able to do it. I'm [30+] years now doing Phlebotomy and I'm worn out nearly at this stage".

In these excerpts, participants explain that absence, while voluntary, may be accompanied by a medical certificate. Thus, the use of certified sick leave to pursue voluntary absenteeism was used as 'cover' to further conceal the voluntary nature of absenteeism<sup>51</sup>.

#### *Motives of Voluntary Absenteeism*

The issue of voluntary absenteeism in the workplace, and its use as an expression of workplace IR conflict, was considered complex by participants. Specifically, the concealment and multiplicity of motives underpinning voluntary absence posed challenges to management. These features are described in the following quote:

"... absenteeism, it's a complex issue... but I would think that it is a manifestation alright of [IR conflict]. It's one of the signs of conflict. Absolutely, yeah, of conflict, yeah, but it is complex, you know, because it's down to individuals, it's [used] in different ways" (HR/IR, γ).

A number of motives for voluntary absenteeism were identified by participants where motives were influenced by individual preferences. Providing support for De Boer *et al.* (2002), participants explained that voluntary absenteeism was used by employees to escape the workplace, and IR conflict. A support staff employee (α) described the recent increase in workload due to the moratorium on recruitment and promotion noting that "... people go sick" as a coping mechanism.

In line with Junor *et al.* (2009), some employees described the use of absenteeism to resist management policy. The connection between this expression of workplace IR conflict and the Freeze response is illustrated in Figure 6.1 with a dashed line. This motive of voluntary absenteeism was described in relation to managerial action on annual leave where employees can, following instructions that annual leave is unavailable, use absenteeism as a defiance or resistance tactic. While resistance as a motive is plausible in this regard, so too is the concept of method displacement (Gall & Hebdon, 2008).

Employees also identified 'quid-pro-quo' as a motive for absenteeism where employees, feeling little loyalty to the workplace, did not hesitate to 'call in sick'. This motive also featured in other

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<sup>51</sup> While beyond the remit of this study, this seeming availability of medical certificates is an issue of concern for organisational and national effectiveness.

expressions including the withdrawal of effort, cooperation, and commitment. Beyond the withdrawal explanation provided by De Boer (2002), there was evidence that employees used absenteeism - and other expressions - to rebalance the employment exchange. These motives are illustrated in the following quotes:

"That's why sick leave is chronic in a lot of the areas, you can't get the time because you can't get people to cover... well if that's the case, I'll go sick" (Support Staff,  $\alpha$ ).

"... I think it's very subtle. I think if people find work [the workplace, recent changes etc.] very difficult, the easiest thing... is to not be there. Well, if I don't feel up to coming into work I'll certainly take a day off sick... I'm - I don't feel particularly that it's - there's a quid-pro-quo in here so I suppose if I wake up and I feel I have a sore throat I'll think 'well, I think I'll stay in bed today'. That's - whereas if it was a slightly different atmosphere in the health service I think I might just [make] that little bit more of an effort..." (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

Consistent with Behrens (2007:117) who asserts that sick leave is a "possible expression... of redirected conflict", the findings confirm that absenteeism is used as an expression of IR conflict in the workplace. In response to IR conflict, absenteeism emerged in two ways: involuntary and voluntary. Involuntary absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict was closely associated with workplace stress arising from issues of discontent in the workplace. Specifically, employees noted stress and involuntary absence arising from work intensification and loss of pay.

In addition to involuntary absenteeism arising from IR conflict, there was also evidence of voluntary absenteeism as IR conflict in the data. Interestingly, while the literature focuses on the difficulty in distinguishing between involuntary and voluntary absence (Bean, 1975), participants - particularly those holding HR/IR management roles - were confident in their identification of the expression. A variety of indicators of voluntary absenteeism were identified, however, a view emerged that participants' interpretation of actions in the context of their experience of occupational groups and specific sets of workplace relations complemented these indicators.

Finally, there was evidence that voluntary absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict is underpinned by a multiplicity of motives. The evidence supports the work of De Boer (2002) who identifies the withdrawal motive of voluntary absenteeism. Similarly, in line with Junor *et al.* (2009) there is confirmation of resistance as the motive of voluntary absenteeism. In addition a quid-pro-quo motive, where employees seek to regain balance in exchange relations, was identified.

## Annual Leave as Workplace Absence

Participants - specifically employees - identified the use of annual leave as an expression of workplace IR conflict. Reminiscent of absenteeism, annual leave can mean many things and is therefore characterised with low visibility. However, in line with Barbash (1979), participants themselves identified using - or 'wasting annual leave' - as an expression of IR conflict. Specifically, this was considered a way of escaping the workplace and dissatisfaction with the employer. The excerpt below illustrates this approach.

"Yeah, I found it *the* [speaker's emphasis] most demoralising thing. Took loads of annual leave, wasted annual leave because I just couldn't come in and face it" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

Managerial participants explained the difficulty in providing a labour-intensive frontline service where maintaining staffing levels in the context of unpredictable attendance was a key consideration. In this regard, annual leave was restricted at times. However this restriction was also identified as a source of discontent in the workplace. These viewpoints are presented below.

"The main thing I have to worry about is ensuring that the service is of the highest quality... that the quality is maintained and you know, all of the things that come out of that, to make sure that there are enough bums on seats... just making sure that we have enough people to provide the service because it's very much a people-driven [sub-lab]" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"[Laboratory Manager] won't let me have annual leave'... you know what I mean. I go... 'Hold on a second'... it's up to them to decide if they can give you annual leave or not. You can't just automatically - you have entitlements to annual leave but you can't just go when you want to go if half the staff are already [gone]" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

The use of annual leave as an expression of IR conflict is not evident in existing literature. It is interesting to note that annual leave shares similarities with voluntary absenteeism. However, in line with Gall and Hebdon (2008), method displacement may occur when annual leave is curtailed causing employees to pursue other expressions including voluntary absenteeism.

## Quitting

Exit, proposed by Hirschman (1970) is considered in employment terms as resignation or quitting (Delery *et al.*, 2000; Addison & Belfield, 2003; Lewin, 2005; Behrens, 2007) and was discussed as an expression of IR conflict. While Hirschman (1980) poses that quitting, moderated by loyalty, is a key response to decline in organisations, participants explained that this expression was not common in the current climate. One employee explained that they would resign due to the implementation of the extended working. This participant explained that while the extended

working day was a source of discontent, it would pose an insurmountable challenge if they had children. This employee qualified this statement explaining that their financial circumstances would permit them to leave the workforce. However, such circumstances were not common. Despite the articulated existence of IR conflict in the workplace, participants explained that they were 'lucky to have a job' in the prevailing economic climate. This sentiment regarding the buoyancy or otherwise of the labour market was also linked to a reluctance to strike or engage in formal industrial action. These competing views are illustrated in the quotes below.

"... how do people cope with [IR Conflict]? They leave. Yeah, when they can. When there's jobs, yeah!" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"... sure there wouldn't be a hope, you'd just have to quit [the] job" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

The findings confirm that quitting is an expression of IR conflict in the workplace. However, this option was often ruled out due to unfavourable labour market dynamics. Consistent with Hirschman (1970) the data indicates that the viability of quitting is a central consideration. Cognisant of the power asymmetry and interdependence of the employment relationship, participants also ruled out other expressions on the basis of job security and a fear of reprimand.

### **Silence**

Silence is considered in the organisational literature as withholding ideas, opinions or information from the employer (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Halos, 2001; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Gambarotto & Camozzo, 2010), and is considered by some IR writers as a form of voice (Lewin, 2008; Budd, 2014).

Participants described silence as an expression of IR conflict where they concealed their own or others' discontent with the workplace and employment relationship. Other scenarios involved withholding suggestions regarding the workplace or the work process. The broader organisational literature identifies two types of silence: acquiescent silence where employees 'resign' themselves to the workplace situation not changing, and defensive silence where employees remain silent due to a fear of retribution (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Both forms were evidenced in the data along with two emergent forms of silence.

Acquiescent silence, considered by Van Dyne *et al.* (2003), arises where an employee remains silent when they feel that they cannot effect change. Participants explained that while there was significant IR conflict in the workplace, employees were essentially resigned to the sources of conflict and had 'given up' trying to solve the issues. These accounts were presented with

reference to the Irish economy and the resource constraints faced by the Irish health service. A Clerical Officer ( $\alpha$ ) described this view:

"Well, it's almost like I've noticed in the last while, I don't know whether it's the economy we're living in and we're all peeved and people are saying 'oh we're lucky to have a job at the moment and... we just have to accept it. It's another cut and... the unions [are] dealing through... management but at the end of the day the staff are just saying - some of the staff are saying 'it's another cut, we just have to grin and bear it... we have a job and we just have to plod on and accept the changes"

The findings provide support for (Harlos, 2001) the concept of 'deaf ear syndrome' where silence is also related to the perceived efficacy of voice. Interestingly, a union representative, while not involved with silence as an employee expression, acknowledged acquiescent silence in the context of a grief process following changes made to the workplace under the tracer issue of LMRS. However silence was also attributed, by some participants, to a lack of opportunity or forum for voice where the HSE was a large and impenetrable organisation.

"Ah, not great at the start, but you had - it was an acceptance, it was denial, frustration, you know, the classic ones, acceptance" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

"... you'll bitch, you'll try the union route, you'll hope it doesn't come to that. I don't know but there's not much else people can do. I mean that's the whole point, the HSE is this big kind of conglomerate organisation and management, it's not anybody you can even speak to" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

The excerpt above raises questions for Trade Unions in this sector where employees, reluctant to use union voice, pursued silence.

Defensive silence was also evident in the data as an expression of IR conflict. Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) explain that defensive silence arises where the employee, exhibiting distrust of the employer or management, keeps silent to protect themselves from retribution. A Union representative ( $\gamma$ ) spoke about how some employees would not have the 'courage' to express workplace IR conflict in a departmental meeting, explaining that employees often do not 'vocalise their grievances', choosing instead to suffer in silence:

"... a lot of people who would feel very hard done by, for whatever reason, often don't vocalise their grievances in [meetings], perhaps they don't have the courage to bring it up in that kind of forum" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

Another participant recounted their own use of defensive silence. During a staff meeting this participant and [their] colleagues discussed possible solutions to a laboratory staffing problem. While laboratory management were planning to seek additional resources from the HSE, this

junior group of employees thought that a change in work practices would improve efficiency and reduce the number of additional staff required which would in turn act as inducement for HSE cooperation. However, when raising this issue at the staff meeting, the participant's colleagues remained silent. This participant explained:

"I'd say they were probably [afraid] - they're junior and I mean quite young, early 20s, you know, and they might just feel a bit intimidated in those situations, I wouldn't be - I'm quite vocal, I wouldn't really be intimidated by those kind of - I was intimidated that day because of... the reaction was not what I expected but yeah and I think as well when they felt - when they heard my boss kind of cutting me down and - and other people, I remember the [laughs] Haematology manager said '[the employee] has some cheek!'" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

Interestingly, following this exchange, the participant stopped attending meetings and withheld suggestions and other information from management on the basis of this negative reaction. Another instance of defensive silence related to career progression. The planned consolidation and redeployment proposed under LMRS will limit the scope for junior staff - basic grade medical scientists - to progress into senior positions. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) discussed a position that arose where their eligibility to apply was not communicated. Despite this employee's strong dissatisfaction regarding the issue, they explained that voicing discontent or grievance-filing would have longer term career implications.

Participants holding managerial roles explained that they also pursued silence. They felt that voicing complaints to higher level management regarding workplace issues was inappropriate, and remained similarly silent to their subordinates going to great lengths to conceal their discontent. A Senior Grade Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ) commented:

"I don't show it, like, I would be very upbeat in the lab because I'm... a Senior. I definitely wouldn't be voicing that I feel disenfranchised".

In addition to acquiescent and defensive silence identified in the literature (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003), 'They should know' silence emerged inductively from the data. Employees described instances of withholding information from management based on the assertion that they, as management, 'should know'. They explained that issues of conflict in the workplace often went undetected by management. The substance of the dissatisfaction was twofold: (i) the initial issue - and (ii) management's failure to recognise, and *manage* the issue. This is reminiscent of Gall and Hebdon (2008) who note that management control the 'power of remedy'. This form of silence emerges as employees emphasise the power - and therefore responsibility - differential between management and labour. Two examples are provided below. The first relates to the use of 'they should know silence' following the closure of a department within the laboratory and the

subsequent failure to re-assign a member of staff. The second centres on a refusal for an annual leave request.

"I didn't actually go to the lab manager, to be fair to [Laboratory manager]. I just decided at that point I'd go to the union because I felt [Laboratory manager] should have known about it" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"Yeah, but I kind of – you kind of feel like then, you see somebody else fighting for it and getting it and kicking up a fuss and you're just kind of like... 'should I, shouldn't I have'... you know, I just kind of feel like, I suppose, management should kind of know that I'm not going to be - I'm not going to put my name down if I don't need a day" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist and union,  $\gamma$ ).

'They should know' silence was also discussed by participants in relation to workload and equity where some employees were aggrieved by management's failure to balance work demands where employees "feel that [management should be noticing these things]" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\theta$ ). In another scenario an issue regarding employee performance arose where one phlebotomist was continually underperforming over a long period of time. The phlebotomy manager ( $\alpha$ ) commented:

"...[employees] looking back on it, have since kind of said 'we actually carried [colleague] for a long time, we just didn't bother doing anything about it', didn't make it known to management as such".

Finally, social silence was also discussed by participants as a behavioural expression of IR conflict where, in line with the process of introversion identified in withdrawal, aggrieved employees pursued 'the silent treatment' to express IR conflict. Despite the particularly covert nature of silence, this expression was identified by managerial participants. Some explained that there was an "undercurrent" where employees stop talking in their presence (Phlebotomy Manager,  $\alpha$ ), while others used the term blanking to describe silence as an expression of workplace IR conflict:

"Blanking. People not talking to you, because you can't give them everything they want, you know" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

Interestingly, while silence was described as a response to conflict between employees and management, it was explained that silence as an expression of IR conflict extended to colleagues. This was described with reference to the accreditation process where independent analysts commented on the lack of non-work related communication between colleagues:

"... there was one column 'Others' and talking would fit into 'Others' whether it's talking about a result or just chatting about something personal or the telly or whatever, but like that was tiny, that was 6%. Like obviously, people chat during their day. There was just silence" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Silence, considered by some as a form of voice (Lewin, 2008; Budd, 2014), was evident in the data as an expression of IR conflict. In addition to acquiescent and defensive silence, identified by Van Dyne *et al.* (2003), two forms of silence emerged. Employees withheld information from management on the basis that they, as management, 'should know'. This form of silence as an expression of IR conflict focuses specifically on the power/responsibility differential between labour and management. A further form of social silence was identified in the data as an expression of IR conflict where employees pursued 'the silent treatment'. While silence is considered as a form of loyal voice in existing literature (Luchak, 2003), its description in the case data indicates that it differs substantially from voice. While related to voice, particularly its efficacy, silence hinged on *avoiding* communication with management. Participants described silence alongside terms of 'carrying on'; 'get on with it'; 'just do your job and go home' which shared similarities with non-physical withdrawal. Thus, rather than a form of voice, silence can be an expression in its own right.

### **Sideways Voice**

Gorden (1988) identifies complaining to colleagues and badmouthing as forms of voice, while Richards (2008) identifies the same practice - venting - on blogs as an expression of workplace conflict. More recently, Budd (2014) calls for exploration of 'griping and shop talk' as 'sideways voice'. The use of sideways voice, or venting<sup>52</sup> was described by participants as an expression of IR conflict. While venting is described as quite a vocal activity, it was used within employee groups where discontent was not directed at management.

"I wouldn't go to a line manager - well, I would - well, where I am now, I probably - I don't know actually, where I am now, I can see other people going to the manager for help and they're not really getting anywhere so no, I probably wouldn't... I just talk, like, I never stop talking, like, or - you know, or I'd have, like, a little bitch to my friends" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\gamma$ ).

While venting, described amongst small groups was a relatively collective, it was not a unionised expression of IR conflict. A union representative ( $\theta$ ) described venting as an expression of IR conflict beyond the remit of the union. This participant explained that prior to becoming a Trade Union representative they participated in and pursued venting as an expression of IR conflict but now considered it counterproductive to the union agenda:

"Yeah, I think that's human nature. You can see it, like. I'm not immune from it, but I try [not to vent]... I used to be that way, don't get me wrong, but being in the union, one of the most important things it says, like, is you need people to be on your side, you don't

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<sup>52</sup> Participants typically used the terms venting or bitching to describe this expression.



want out and out conflict. You don't want them to be the enemy. You want to bring them into the fold... if you have conflict, you're always going to get a 'no' from them [management]" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

Participants lamented the seeming association between venting and inaction. A member of support staff ( $\alpha$ ) explained that while venting was "a big bark and no bite", it engendered discontent in them. Managerial participants also proffered the view that venting spreads workplace IR conflict. Participants explained, however, that following venting, the decision to act and the choice of expression was largely individual. In contrast, a Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) provided one example where venting developed into a more collective and organised, albeit non-union, informal and unofficial expression of workplace IR conflict. In this instance a grassroots approach was adopted where connected episodes of venting lead to a covert but workplace-wide expression of resistance. This account is provided below:

"It kind of starts - it gets discussed beforehand, not in any kind of big collection of people, just kind of gets from one to the next in little groups and then we say... 'Yeah, yeah, we're not doing it if they're not doing it, so we won't do it'... that kind of stuff and that's kind of how it works. And, you know, it kind of gets to the point where management think this policy is being enacted and we're all doing this, but you know, 16 months down the line, they find we haven't been doing it at all, you know, that kind of a thing" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

From analysing the interview data a number of explanations for the use of venting as an expression of IR conflict were identified. In many regards venting acted as a pressure valve, releasing suppressed frustration with the employer and management. A Chief Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) explained their own use of venting due to its cathartic value:

"Me? I go in and give out to [Laboratory Manager]. And [they'll] say, 'What can I do about it?' And I say, 'nothing, [Laboratory Manager]', but [venting] just get[s] it off your chest"

This example illustrates that venting was pursued at management level where managers - also employees - vent to each other to express IR conflict.

A second explanation for venting described by participants centred on validation or social proof where views were mirrored to signal agreement or support regarding the issues of discontent in the workplace. Accounts of venting demonstrated little collusion as to whether to pursue action, or what action to pursue. Rather, venting was used in this regard to establish common issues. This is similar to Bartunek *et al.* (2008), organisational scholars, on the use of group sense-making.

Thirdly, participants explained that some employees - reluctant to pursue action themselves - vent with the intention of encouraging others to act or 'do their dirty work'. In such instances it was recognised that different individuals have different preferences regarding the expression of

IR conflict. While some favoured inaction, others - once aggrieved - felt compelled to act. This latter group felt that the former utilised these tendencies to indirectly pursue further expression of IR conflict. Managerial accounts of this process were also evident. Examples of these explanations for venting are provided below:

"They usually slag [management]... You'd usually get the... old coffee room... 'Ah, that fuckin' eejit... basically, slag them [management] off to other colleagues. It's probably psychology like, you know what I mean. They just - they want people to reinforce their opinion of that person" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ )

"... people just aren't bothered... a lot of the time they'll give out hell or they'd be rising. They know there's a few people who they know they'll go giving out, and go and rise them - and then they'll do the action" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"There probably is levels of venting now. To be honest, there was a colleague of mine in a similar position in another lab who was saying we should be on strike... and kept telling myself we should be on strike. And that was probably the worst pressure I had... [colleague] wasn't going on strike, but he was - Stirring it, and you can get people to stir it and they won't do it themselves" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

As with silence, participants described a point in the IR conflict process in which discontent infiltrated interpersonal relationships between colleagues. In such circumstances a long period of venting created frustration with some employees, and the desire to 'stop taking about it' emerged. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ) noted the need to "change the subject at break times". The tendency for the group to split was described by a support staff employee who explained that while a cohort of employees continue to vent, others 'opt out'.

"[y]ou've got to block it [venting] out because if you don't you'll go under... I'd say about half of them have done the same, half of my colleagues have kind of gone introvert where they just kind of suck it up" (Support Staff,  $\alpha$ ).

The data also demonstrates the use of venting as an expression of IR conflict. This concept is noted by Richards (2008). However, other authors speculate on similar concepts including complaining and badmouthing (Gorden, 1988); gossip (Waddington & Fletcher, 2005); and griping (Budd, 2014). However, venting or sideways voice focused on communicating discontent to colleagues, not to management. In this regard, venting departs from the voice construct. Further, participants described an association between silence and venting where venting acted as a pressure valve to maintain silence toward management. Despite this, participants with managerial roles were aware of venting. In some instances management would 'overhear' venting, and in others they would walk into a room where employees would suddenly stop talking - and go 'silent'. Interestingly, venting was one of the most collective expressions described by participants. However this expression - thought to spread IR conflict - was not typically used to

coordinate group expression of IR conflict. Again, as with silence and soft voice, there was no evidence of union involvement.

### **Tardiness**

Tardiness, as poor time keeping, is considered an expression of IR conflict in current literature (Bean, 1975; Barbash, 1979; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Hebdon & Stern, 1988; Hebdon, 2005). Managerial participants explained how patterns of lateness at the beginning of the working day or after breaks emerged with some employees. In addition, some managers found that employees left the workplace early. While recognising this behaviour as an indicator of IR conflict, some participants with managerial responsibility focused more on the conflict arising from managing tardiness. When managerial participants did consider the root cause, a variety of issues were deliberated. While IR conflict or dissatisfaction in the employment relationship was acknowledged, emphasis was placed on individual habits and circumstances. Thus, the visibility of tardiness was low in these case studies. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"people get a coffee break in the morning, officially it's 15 minutes. I suppose it's 20, half an hour really... I suppose what could happen down the road is that we could look at time-keeping, clocking-in, using fingerprints" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"... if you had to speak to them about their time-keeping or something like that, they could just get in a huff for a while" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Interestingly, employee participants did not focus their description on their own use of tardiness, they described that of their colleagues. Some held the view that tardiness arose from "... personality as opposed to doing something out of revenge" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ), while others identified it as a problem in their department arising from IR conflict. In contrast, a union representative ( $\gamma$ ) explained that, following a grievance with management, employees would not pursue tardiness because such behaviour would provide management with more 'ammunition'. These competing viewpoints are evidenced below:

"... if there's a conflict, especially if it's between management and staff, it's kind of like you're giving them more fuel if you do something like that [tardiness]... if you have a situation that you feel you've been hard done by, sure you're just giving management [more fuel]... 'Well, I mean, why were you taking an hour and a half for your lunch the last three days?'. You know, you're kind of almost giving them more fuel so - I haven't seen that happen here..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"Yeah, you'd certainly see a link there alright and lateness, tardiness is a - I suppose everywhere it kind of is but I suppose that can be down to the individual line manager as well. Like, what I find is I think you need to be direct and we have that problem at the minute that we all get punished" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

Consistent with existing literature (Barbash, 1979), there was evidence of tardiness as an expression of IR conflict. However, providing support for Godard (2011) who speculates that the sprawl of managerial control may have increased the costs of strike and non-strike expressions, there was also evidence to suggest that tardiness may be considered by employees as a risky expression of IR conflict where increased monitoring highlights tardiness and result in discipline.

## **Withdrawal**

Participants described physical withdrawal from the workplace in the form of absenteeism, annual leave, quitting, and tardiness. Non-physical forms of withdrawal were also evident as expressions of workplace IR conflict. Withdrawal of effort and cooperation, as expressions of IR conflict in existing literature (Turkington, 1975; Barbash, 1979; Hebdon & Stern, 1998; Harrison *et al.*, 2001; Hebdon, 2005), involve a reduction in performance and flexibility. These expressions centred on rebalancing exchange relations where employees sought to pull away from, or give less to, the employment relationship. In addition to these expressions of IR conflict, two other forms of withdrawal were identifiable.

### **Withdrawal of Effort**

Withdrawal of effort is considered as a reduction in performance (Barbash, 1979). Dissatisfied in the employment relationship, employees sought to reduce the amount of work they did or the effort they invested. Stemming from the mixed motive nature of the employment relationship, employees sought to rebalance the give-and-take exchange where reducing effort increases value derived from employment. This expression was discussed in similar terms to a 'go-slow'. However, withdrawal of effort was covert and informal. Further, the data indicated that withdrawal of effort was largely pursued on an individual basis. Examples are provided below.

"'I'm not doing more than' - I think they do cope with it [workplace IR conflict]. They don't give you your 100%" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I suppose you can see it that people aren't willing participants in the work activity, they don't give all, there is a hold-back, they slow down in particular areas, you start to develop backlogs. There is a tendency to not participate" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"I think that people just kind of get lazy, they're not really bothered, they're not as motivated to do their work" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Participants, in describing withdrawal of effort as an expression of IR conflict, drew connections to changes in the workplace and repeated assaults on the employee position. A view emerged that this had precipitated a change in behaviour. Though employees continue to be 'professional' participants explained that the "work ethic has changed" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Therefore it is concluded, on the basis of the data, that withdrawal of effort is used as an expression of IR conflict.

### Withdrawal of Cooperation

Turkington (1975) identifies withdrawal of cooperation as an expression of IR conflict where the dynamic in the employment relationship becomes inflexible. This expression shares similarities with the work-to-rule - a term some participants used to describe withdrawal of cooperation. However the key distinctions again relate to informality and individuality that characterised withdrawal of cooperation. No union vote or procedure was pursued, and while replicated within and across cases, the expression was predominantly described in individual terms. Despite the lack of union involvement, managerial participants identified withdrawal of cooperation as amongst the most common expressions they observed:

"I think the most common one, as I've said, is the withdrawal of cooperation, like that'd be the one" that I would see" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"There are a number, I suppose, you might find an employee who's uncooperative. I suppose, sickness, their uncooperative behaviour. They would probably be the main ones I see" (IR/HR Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

Demonstrative of the overlap between work-to-rule and withdrawal of cooperation, a phlebotomy manager ( $\beta$ ) described how employees<sup>53</sup> can rigidly adhere to specified guidelines regarding the length of time required with each patient which were followed by some employees to the detriment of overall service provision:

"... they're regimental about sticking to their time... the guidelines are eight minutes per patient but that's... if the patient is quite ill. So some people, some staff just think you give each patient eight minutes and there's no need. There is no need".

The motivations of withdrawal identified by participants were varied and often rooted in individual circumstances. Participants recounted differing examples pertaining to individual employees. In one instance withdrawal of cooperation was attributed to an unsuccessful application for promotion while another was rooted in employee dissatisfaction regarding Christmas leave. In addition to these individual issues of discontent, a broader motivation was identified by a Senior Medical Scientist who explained that withdrawal of cooperation is motivated by a feeling of disempowerment. Examples are provided in the following quotes:

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<sup>53</sup> Though this excerpt refers to 'some staff', the participant explained later in the interview that this was the behaviour of just one individual.

"I've had conflict with people who constantly wore headphones at meetings and that has been a difficulty but that I regard as almost inappropriate behaviour and that went further up the line. I couldn't handle that where they refused to even listen... they had looked for promotion which wasn't forthcoming... And one of the ways they refused to communicate was that they did their work but plugged in headphones every day of the week and attended meetings and refused to cooperate" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"Well, I just go back to what we said before, they just don't cooperate and they're just not enthusiastic or they just say... 'whatever you like'... you know, if you sort of try and suggest something to somebody and they'll say... 'Ah, whatever you think'... or... 'You're the boss'... or whatever, you know. Where people were positive [before issues of workplace IR conflict] about it kind of thing" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

These findings confirm that withdrawal of cooperation is as an expression of IR conflict. In addition to these forms of withdrawal evident in previous literature, two additional forms of withdrawal emerged inductively from the data.

#### Withdrawal of Commitment

The data indicated that employees withdraw commitment as an expression of IR conflict. Participants described withdrawal of commitment as an expression of IR conflict. While withdrawal of effort involved doing less work and withdrawal of cooperation consists of reducing flexibility, withdrawal of commitment is described by participants as ceasing of anything over and above the call of duty. Many participants - management and employees alike - stated that the 'extra mile' has been withdrawn. Participants explained that following workplace IR conflict - either a singular event or a pattern of discontent - employees respond by changing their behaviour. Instead of doing extra things to improve their work or the laboratory, they would do what was required - no more and no less. This was frequently termed '*just doing your job*'. This expression is illustrated in the following quotes:

"How does it affect my behaviour? How does it manifest - ? Well, to be very blunt... you know, you come in and say... 'I'm doing my day-to-day work and that's it. I'm not doing any more.' You become, you know - It affects your motivation in a major way... I suppose, to a degree, it affects your own personal work as well, because you just kind of say... 'You know, I'm clocking in the hours, I'll do my job and I won't go one step outside of what's down on paper, what I'm supposed to be doing.' And you know, you just totally feel demotivated... you feel like why do I bother type of thing" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ )

"I like people to come to work and bring their [brain] - it's not just what they can do with their hands, it's what they do with their mind as well and I think, if a person is discontented, their mind isn't - they'll do their work, but they won't go that extra mile" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Clear links were made by participants between issues of workplace IR conflict and the withdrawal of commitment. Participants often attributed this expression to changes in employment contracts, and specifically changes to pay, status, and workload. Beyond traditional contractual terms, the changes to the nature of the employment relationship may be considered with reference to breach of the psychological contract, where participants described that - following the onslaught of changes in the workplace - employees no longer exhibit loyalty to their organisation, or employer:

"[p]eople are under pressure or at least they feel they're under pressure in relation to staff numbers. They don't have adequate numbers to carry out the work, they resent having to take their pay cuts so I think morale is not good throughout the health service at the moment. Now there's some fantastic people in it, don't get me wrong, and there's people putting way and above, you know, what they should and I think there's huge resentment, you know, to the change in status... I think I feel there was a better commitment to the organisation in the past" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

This participant provided an example where employees, who arrived in the workplace early to secure parking, used to start machinery in advance of their shift to avoid delays. This small discretionary task was recently withdrawn. This was confirmed by a Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ) from the same case:

"So it's really, they're just doing the hours that they're contracted for definitely, they'll only come in from 9-5 whereas people - definitely I remember a staff here used to start at 8 because it suits them to travel in for eight to get parking X, Y and Z... they used to start from 8-9 and do extra work whereas they don't do it anymore... They still come in early... They don't work".

The discussion of withdrawal of commitment was described with regard to professional employees where withdrawal of commitment was linked to loss of professional drive and the non-availability of promotional opportunities. The quotes provided below provide an insight into this change in employee behaviour:

"might have been fairly chirpy... eager... they're not now, they just couldn't give a damn and they would never have thought they'd think that about their job but they just see no future in it... there's no level to be promoted... they could have the potential to become brilliant scientists in the future" (Trade Union Representative,  $\beta$ ).

"[I]come in, do my work, go home... I would have been doing extra stuff at home. There would have been studies, there would have been courses... I do what I'm supposed to do. I'm not taking shortcuts. But I'm not interested in pursuing... anything extra, like, going to conferences or, you know, reading papers - no" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

The findings demonstrate that withdrawal of commitment is an expression of IR conflict. Interestingly, the withdrawal of commitment is not emphasised in existing IR literature as an

expression of IR conflict. However, HR literature devotes much attention to high commitment practices and the psychological contract.

### Social Withdrawal

Participants also described social withdrawal from the employment relationship. In this regard, employees ceased any and all social engagement associated with the workplace such as salutations, lunch breaks and non-work conversations<sup>54</sup>. A Laboratory manager ( $\beta$ ) described these behaviours as arising from conflict between employer/management and employee. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this behaviour was provided by a support staff employee ( $\alpha$ ). This participant explained that, following recent grievances and widespread discontent in Irish healthcare, employees retreat to their car for lunch choosing to avoid the workplace, management and their colleagues at every opportunity. These dynamics are illustrated in the following quotes:

"People have been - I've noticed people in different sections, even lunch breaks, they don't bother mixing with people, they sit in the car park, listen to the radio and get a break: 'I need to get out of here, I've got to get away'" (Support Staff,  $\alpha$ ).

"... it was getting so difficult that people weren't tolerating one another really, you know, if I came in to have coffee here now you'd have got up and walked out. If I came [into the staff room] in the morning - it's not that you'd pass me but you probably didn't salute me" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"Discontented - I suppose another way to describe it is - would be that I'm normally a very chatty person, I would go very quiet, I wouldn't be talking and I mean it really shows in my face... I would be fairly short, like, if management [were] passing me and they said hello and they were getting ready for conversation I would just say hello and I'd keep walking" (Phlebotomy Manager,  $\beta$ ).

These excerpts signal two interesting features in the data. First, while these behaviours were identified by participants as expressions of IR conflict, employee withdrawal spread to colleagues. This is reminiscent of social silence. Secondly, the Phlebotomy manager, describing their own use of withdrawal to express IR conflict, distinguishes between themselves and management. The notion that managers are both 'management' and 'employee' adds further complexity to workplace IR conflict.

In sum, the data confirms the use of withdrawal of effort and cooperation as expressions of IR conflict. Withdrawal expressions were subtle. Often employees were not doing anything 'wrong' but rather chose to change the dynamic of their employment relationship. Interestingly, these

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<sup>54</sup> Participants also described a decline in socialising amongst the Medlab group. This feature of the data is considered in Chapter 7.



expressions share similarities with go-slow and work-to-rule actions which were notably absent from the data. While some participants used these terms in a colloquial manner, there was no union involvement. Further, these expressions were described as individual and covert expressions of IR conflict where management were not formally - or informally - notified of industrial action. Withdrawal of commitment was also identified as an expression of IR conflict in the data. Though not dominant in IR literature as an expression of IR conflict, there are links to HR and OB literatures on high commitment work practices and the psychological contract. In many regards, based on these descriptions of how employee withdrawal as an expression of IR conflict is used in the workplace, there may be further scope to integrate OB research on disengagement. The data also identifies social withdrawal as an expression of IR conflict. Neglect, considered next, can also be conceptualised as the withdrawal of care.

### **Neglect**

Neglect is defined as a "failure to perform...duties either properly or with a sufficient level of care" (Allen & Tüselmann, 2009:39). On the whole, participants stressed that neglect is not a deliberate expression of IR conflict. This view was often related to the nature of the work and the potential impact on patient safety. However, participants linked issues of workplace IR conflict to workplace stress and errors.

"... we're really short-staffed... we're concerned that we'll be left open if there's a case [legal action following an error]... we have raised it to our management and to higher management that we're unhappy. This has been going on [for] four years. You know, and people are under pressure, they're doing too much and prone to errors" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

While prefacing any actions as unintentional, participants also described how departures from organisational procedures resulted in organisational errors. Providing a detailed example of an incident involving a multi-level system failure whereby clinically significant patient results were not issued to either the patient or the patient's GP, a Laboratory Manager ( $\alpha$ ) identified a failure to adhere to policy as a key source managerial dissatisfaction. An excerpt is provided below.

"... that's what bugs me, it's that - because these things [breaking with procedures] will lead to errors. Errors can be serious or minor but if they're very serious they can lead to death or delayed diagnosis... So when I find out that if they had followed their own procedures of checks it would have been detected prior to the results going out or no result going out... that's when I would be angry... There was one... we got the sample and it didn't have a consultant or a GP on it so we didn't know who it was from... we failed on two occasions; one was to pick up that we didn't have a consultant on the form and there was no follow up; secondly, when the report was printed it said 'unknown consultant' so the written report got nowhere. Now, that led to delayed diagnosis... so I'm quite furious about that... it's designed to safeguard the patient" (Laboratory Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

Consistent with existing literature (Turkington, 1975; Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Edwards, 1992; Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013), the data confirms that neglect is an expression of IR conflict. Participant recognition of neglect as an expression of IR conflict was, however, embedded in the research context and the centrality of patient care. Interestingly, despite a clear concern for patient safety, there was evidence of errors associated with issues described as IR conflict. This may be an effort to avoid dissonance where participants are reluctant to acknowledge their behaviour as neglect in the context of the patient. In a similar vein to involuntary absenteeism, IR conflict was considered a contributor to workplace stress which in turn triggered neglect expressions.

In review, flight expressions, more passive than fight equivalents, centred on physical and non-physical retreat. Absenteeism is identified as an expression of IR conflict used to escape the workplace, and rebalance exchange relations. Annual leave was described in a similar fashion. There was also some evidence, supporting Junor *et al.* (2009) and Mulholland (2004), that absenteeism were used to pursue sabotage and resistance. These areas of crossover are denoted in the data structure, Figure 6.1, by dashed lines.

Both silence, and venting are positioned here as expressions in their own right. The data highlights that their characteristics and use in the workplace depart from voice. Instead of communicating with management, employees use silence to withhold from management. Similarly, venting - often described alongside silence - communicates discontent with colleagues, not superiors. Further, these expressions share characteristics with non-physical withdrawal expressions where employees pull away from the employment relationship. Links to physical withdrawal are also evident. For example, acquiescent silence, where employees become resigned to the substance of discontent, is a less active form of quitting or absenteeism. Thus, while acknowledging the relationship between voice, silence, and venting evident in existing literature (Harlos, 2001; Luchak, 2003; Lewin, 2008; Richards, 2008; Budd, 2014) and in the data, these expressions are best captured as a flight response to threat in the employment relationship.

#### FREEZE

The freeze response explains why some individuals, when under threat, stay still. In many regards the freeze response is the midway point between fight and flight. While neither entirely passive nor active, freeze expressions are akin to a peaceful protest: employees 'shall not be moved'. Participants described a freeze response where they 'stood their ground' and 'dug their heels in' in response to IR conflict. In many ways, the purpose of the freeze response to IR conflict is to halt the dynamic of the employment relationship and maintain the status quo of exchange relations.

## Resistance

Resistance is defined in IR literature as actions of opposition to management where the concept is inclusive of a wide variety of non-strike expressions of IR conflict (Edwards, 1992, 1995; Gall & Hebbon, 2008; Belanger & Edwards, 2013). However, as noted in Chapter 2, a narrower lens was adopted where resistance is considered as refusal to accept or comply with managerial direction. In this regard, the HR/OB conceptualisation of resistance informed analysis. When describing their experience of IR conflict in the workplace, participants described resistance as an expression of IR conflict where employees refused to concede their position. This is evident in the following example:

"Yeah, it's a bit silly like so you can only make an example of somebody so much and I would put my foot down then. I would not concede anymore" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Participants described resistance as an expression of IR conflict where resistance was deployed in an overt manner in unison with other expressions of IR conflict including voice, and instances where resistance was subtle and conducted without articulation of opposition to management. Arising perhaps from the many ways resistance was deployed, some participants did not consider resistance behaviour as IR conflict - but recognised that it did present in an IR forum. Despite this, HR/IR managers, line managers and employees held the view that resistance represented a common expression of workplace IR conflict. These competing accounts are presented below.

"They weren't doing it, yeah, they weren't going to do it until they got an agreement with the union and they wanted us to discuss it with their union. Not doing it, absolutely yeah, 'Ulster says no,' not happening, and we had to maintain the old practice even though we had a service level agreement in place with the new provider that this was the way this was going to be done, but we had to put that on hold" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"... some of them just ignore... management. They become - it's the more you push somebody, the less they're going to do and this is what's happened - I've seen it happening now in other departments as well... is that people are just kind of getting to the point where they'll say... 'Yeah, yeah, no worries, I'll do that'... and just ignore it" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"They [employee resistance issues] have manifested... in an industrial relations sort of format but at the same time when we're trying to change the way something is done there might be some reluctance... I would call it more reluctance than conflict" (Consultant,  $\alpha$ ).

The experts above outline three examples of resistance. The first is articulated resistance, and is identified as an expression of IR conflict. The second is unarticulated resistance, and is also identified as IR conflict. However, the third, while articulated to management, is not considered IR

conflict. This signals the differing interpretations of employee behaviours. Demonstrative of varied expression of IR conflict, there were four forms of resistance evident in the data: resistance to change, resistance to loss, resistance to more, and resistance as revenge.

### Resistance to Change

Resistance to change has remained a central area of interest in HR and OB literatures where employees are considered a barrier to the implementation of change (Ford *et al.*, 2008; Conway & Monks, 2008), and specifically the shift from the 'known to the unknown' in the workplace (Bovey & Hede, 2001). Resistance to change was, in some instances, motivated by poor trust relations where change - as an uncertain process - requires faith in management and management's agenda. This issue was described in relation to the LMRS and specifically the extended working day. Participants were aggrieved by how the change was 'sold' where the articulated purpose was to improve patient care, patient access and waiting times. Some employees felt that this was disingenuous explaining that the true rationale centred on further reduction of the on-call wage bill. Examples of these views are provided below.

"I think our 8 to 8 is a token 8 to 8 and that it's just really about saving money on-call, moving away from the fee per item and that's really the reason why we're the only ones doing 8 to 8 ... 'Oh, it'll decrease waiting times... I think that was a whole load of nonsense... I think it was solely about clawing money back on-call... it's all about minimum numbers and just the cheapest option" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

"Refusal to implement something new or something like that, I think. That would be the more common, yeah" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

The data also suggests that employees found the uncertainty associated with workplace change challenging. Specifically, the LMRS and the announcement of hub labs has been delayed for a number of years leaving many employees feeling 'in limbo' where imagining the change is more daunting than the change itself. Participants explained the psychological difficulty associated with workplace change and its related uncertainty with reference to fear and anxiety. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"... they're being redeployed to other areas that they mightn't have worked in before and some staff don't like to be moved and would have an issue with - 'Well, I don't feel I can work over there'... they don't want to move" (HR/IR,  $\theta$ )

"... if this happens, we could be coming to [X hospital], but [maybe] we [are] going to have to go to [Y hospital]... 'I live in [specified place] and this is just going to ruin my life and I've children... it's in the air for so long... people being very frustrated" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

A Phlebotomy manager ( $\beta$ ) described an example of resistance to change in relation to an IT

system where implementation of the system was reversed for a number of years. Interestingly, resistance to change was not limited to employees but also management. In this example, the Phlebotomy manager outlines how they were involved in resistance. Further, when discussing the LMRS, this participant explains that they will resist any changes to working hours or location.

"... we just told them 'Sorry, we're not partaking in it. There is no backup, there's no IT, they don't start until later. We're *not* [speaker's emphasis] IT people'... When you have [large group of] Phlebotomists all standing and saying 'No, we're not doing it' you take it as no, we're not doing it and we also got the consultants behind us and we just said to them 'Look it's not working, your patients are suffering at the end of the day'".

"Well if it comes in when I'm here I will resist... I don't know, I'll have to see what will be open to me".

While participants described resistance to large scale workplace change, resistance to small scale change was also evident. Examples provided below related to resisting small solutions to identified problems in the workplace.

"... 'Oh'... it was actually kind of hilarious. I thought they were completely over-reacting. It was unbelievable - completely... they were like... 'I'm not listening to that, I haven't been informed of this, this wasn't discussed properly, this wasn't implemented properly'... and yeah... [T]hey were moaning about it for weeks. Any time the light went on in specimen reception, I think they've forgotten about it, they never use it, I think maybe once a week now it goes off and generally... one of the other [employees] just knocks it off and goes in and gets it and sucks it up" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"Well I suppose they wanted us all to work together, the core lab, we were quite happy about it and we all - all the lab aides moved out and they'd the desks all [rounded] up... it was for everyone to... work together and ease of access... I think it lasted about two days... other people just wouldn't take to it" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\alpha$ ).

The Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ) explained how employees resisted the use of a light signal system to alert employees to new samples while the Medical Lab Aide ( $\alpha$ ) explained that their colleagues had resisted sitting together where resistance to the change of seating layout was quietly undermined by moving desks back to their original positions.

Providing support for Fox (1966 cited in Eldridge, 1973), the data indicates that resistance to change is used as an expression of IR conflict.

#### Resistance to Loss

Dent and Goldberg (1999) argue that employees do not resist change but rather employees - as self-interested beings - resist loss. The data indicates that resistance to loss is an expression of IR conflict in the workplace. Resistance to financial loss was described by participants, particularly in the context of the extended working day and revised on-call payments under the LMRS. It was

broadly acknowledged that Medlab scientists "lost a lot of money" (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ). As noted with resistance to change, some participants were quite vocal about the true rationale for the extended working day arguing that while the articulated reasoning is based on service requirements, the real basis for the change was to reduce the costs associated with on-call duty. However, others explained that while there was resistance to loss of earnings, employees could understand the changes in the context of resource constraints. Despite some understanding of the management position, a view emerged that no more cuts in pay would be tolerated. In this regard, participants were not going to move any further. These dynamics are illustrated in the following quotes.

"Some people will be worse than others, but we were all in this together. We built our lifestyle on a certain salary. Mine was being cut the same as theirs" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"We came to the middle ground and that's it. What else can you do? It's compromise" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

"... there was some resistance to it being brought in, but at least we could understand that it was - they were running a business, it was costing them money, it was costing them staff and it wasn't going to last..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Employees resisted loss in several areas of employment. Some participants - particularly in the context of the LMRS and potential redeployment - were concerned about loss of employment. Other resistance to loss issues related to the loss of concession days, free parking, and tea/coffee facilities. Participants pursued resistance to loss in this regard by withdrawing cooperation for accreditation work, and through voice expressions. Examples are provided below.

"Will there be a job? Will I be offered redundancies?... "What if there's no need for me? Where will I go?... do I lose my job?", you know. So there is - there is that fear"(Union,  $\beta$ ).

"I suppose they were just, like, having these meetings, wanting to reverse it really, like, saying the hospital had no right to hand over the control of the car park, custom and practice come into it... 'we've always had this parking so you can't take it away from us'... you know, when there is no onus on the hospital to provide parking at all..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist, Union,  $\gamma$ ).

Employees and union representatives explained that seemingly small issues were magnified by existing grievances. On a practical level, the extended working day means that privately provided facilities are not available outside normal working hours, while reduced income makes employees more sensitive - or elastic - to an increase in costs in the workplace. Beyond practical considerations, there seemed to be an emotional response to the withdrawal of facilities which were interpreted by employees as a loss of respect on the part of the employer.

Resistance to loss of professional status was also identified. Participants described how changes in work patterns or practices were resisted due to a fear of losing professional skills and status. Relating to the professional nature of many healthcare employees, findings in this regard are presented in Chapter 6. The case data confirms that employees resist loss to express IR conflict. However, departing from Dent and Goldberg (1999), the data also confirms that employees resist change for this purpose.

#### Resistance to More

In line with existing literature, resistance to change (Ford *et al.*, 2008) and resistance to loss (Dent & Goldberg, 1999) were evident in this study. However, adding to our understanding of resistance and its use as an expression of workplace IR conflict, two other forms of resistance emerged from the data. Resistance to more and resistance as revenge were described by participants. Arguably exacerbated by the resource-constrained climate and increasing demand for healthcare (Weber, 2011), employees described how they resisted more work; more hours; and more responsibility. Workload can increase in two ways: take on additional duties as above, or do more of the same. A Medical Lab Aide ( $\gamma$ ) explained that, following a redeployment from a small hospital, workload increased while staffing ratio decreased. Against this backdrop, this participant explained a reluctance to take on additional duties - even temporarily. Further examples are provided in the following quotes:

"[Laboratory Reconfiguration] etc... the economic climate has changed dramatically... I suppose that's the challenge these days...doing more with less" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"The threat of losing your job... you can't really level the score anymore. Maybe... years ago where you can have representation and say 'look, I've been asked to do this' and you have somebody there who can say 'no this is not part of your duties'. Now you're... kind of like 'well maybe I should do it' or 'I'll do it under protest' and once you do it under protest... it's part of your duties" (Support Staff,  $\alpha$ ).

Interestingly, in both of these excerpts participants reference the current context. The manager notes the change in the economic climate and, related to this, the support staff employee explains how resistance to more has become difficult due to the threat of job loss. Specifically, this participant explains that employees were better able to 'resist more' - with the assistance of representation - prior to changes in the economic context. This has implications for how employee representatives are considered in the current climate - an issue explored further in Chapter 7.

In addition to more work, employees described resistance to more hours. These discussions referenced the extended working day and the PSA 2 negotiations which were ongoing at the time

of data collection. A Chief Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ), exhibiting scepticism regarding further attacks on pay and working time, envisioned a strong and negative response to proposed changes regarding Saturday work. A union representative ( $\theta$ ) explained, in relation to changes to the length of the working week under PSA 2, that it's "only twenty-four minutes a day" when broken down. However many proffered the view that 'this was not what they signed up for'. This sentiment is further illustrated in the following quote:

"I think with the employer the discontent is in relation to an extended working day, a lot of them feel that they signed on for a 9-5, now we're seeing the situation that we have to provide a service between 8-8 over five days a week. Now, the potential there is also for a Saturday... I think people are dissatisfied with that" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

HR/IR managers presented similar views regarding resistance to more, explaining that employees, when aggrieved, "can say no to being asked to do something, you know, something extra or something they perceive as not in their job spec" (HR/IR,  $\alpha$ ). A Laboratory Manager ( $\gamma$ ) discussed 'resistance to more' extensively in the context of workplace IR conflict. This participant states:

"... we had some conflict would have been with [additional services]... people... refused to take on the roles so. Yeah, maybe as they saw it, [as more] responsibility".

#### Resistance as Revenge

'Resistance as Revenge' was the final form of resistance that emerged from the data. Participants described instances where employees resisted the managerial prerogative as a form of revenge or retribution. In such instances employees, aggrieved with management from previous interactions, used resistance as a means to enact revenge, push back or settle the score. Resistance to change, loss, or more, to express IR conflict, can arise for several reasons. However, employees also recounted experiences involving episodes of resistance where the target of resistance was not the source of discontent. In one particular dispute, laboratory management requested that all windows remain closed to provide a stable temperature for machinery. A Chief Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ) described an instance of resistance as revenge:

"I articulated to the staff "Keep the windows closed, keep the doors closed"... I go out then and I see all the windows open and I say "Who opened the window?" and this person says "I opened the windows", "But I thought we agreed that we'll keep the windows closed?", "I opened them" and I said "No, we agreed that we keep the windows closed" so then I go around closing them. That makes me feel a bit - they're undermining my authority and I look like a school teacher coming in".

This episode arose following a protracted dispute regarding the air conditioning. Thus, the resistance to keeping the windows closed (change) was rooted in another, albeit related, conflict.



Other participants holding managerial roles identified the same dynamic. A HR/IR Manager ( $\alpha$ ) noted the influence of previous grievances on current behaviour in the expression of IR conflict. In this regard workplace IR conflict as it is enacted may be indicative of an entirely different dispute where a time lag exists between conflict, reactance and expression. Quotes are provided to illustrate this theme in the data:

"They'll always level the score... okay, you get one [win] - there's always some other little change coming, you know, that you, you know, you have to be on good terms with staff because you might get one win, but you know, if you're going to keep winning in the longer term - it ain't going to work. There's always something else next week where you need your staff with you like, you know. Well, they'll [employees] make something else more awkward for you, that's for sure. So - there's no [winning] – they'd [employees] be waiting for you, you know. There's no winning in that sense" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"Well you can have the going sick and the cert coming in or it's the doing the minimum and just the attitude, not being very open to change, you know, going back to the change question... somebody may not be open if they have grievances or perceived grievances, you know, if they're nursing them from the recent past or not so recent past" (HR/IR,  $\alpha$ ).

IR literature considers resistance as a broad construct containing many forms of non-strike expressions (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Balser & Stern, 1999; Mulholland, 2004, Gall & Hebdon, 2008). However, in adopting a narrower view, it is possible to see nuances in the use of resistance as an expression of IR conflict. In line with Dent and Goldberg (1999) the data indicates that resistance to loss as an expression of IR conflict. However, the data - reminiscent of early IR writings (Fox, 1966) and consistent with managerial literature (Bovey & Hede, 2001) - confirms that employees also resist change as an expression of IR conflict. However, further complexity is evident where employees also pursued resistance to more, and resistance as revenge to express dissatisfaction in the employment relationship.

In sum, the expression of resistance as IR conflict was closely associated with a freeze response which was not captured by Hirschman's (1970) exit-voice framework. Resistance does not hinge on quit or withdrawal behaviour. Similarly, it is not as active as voice, though it may be accompanied by this expression. The findings demonstrate that employees resist change (Fox, 1966 cited in Eldridge, 1973; Conway & Monks, 2008) and loss (Dent & Goldberg, 1999) to express workplace IR conflict. The study also identifies, based on the inductive elements of analysis, resistance to more and resistance as revenge as expressions of IR conflict.

## FIX

The fix response emerged directly from the data where participants themselves described how some employees, faced with issues of discontent in the workplace or the employment

relationship, seek to 'fix' issues of discontent. In this regard, soft voice is repositioned where employees sought to communicate solutions - rather than problems - to management<sup>55</sup>. Participants also described taking corrective action.

### Soft Voice

Soft voice is considered as the communication of ideas and opinions (Bagchi, 2011). There was some evidence to support this broader understanding of voice where participants described employee efforts to articulate and pursue solutions to issues of workplace discontent. Attempts to remedy particular issues, or improve the workplace more generally were described where participants used language around 'fixing'. An example is provided by a Consultant ( $\alpha$ ) who describes a process of continuous improvement in the workplace:

"Well, I, like well what you try and do is put forward, you know, try to come up with a solution that's going to fix it [lab service delivery]"

Another example of soft voice was described by a member of administrative staff and the communication of an idea relating to the electronic storage of files in an effort to reduce storage space requirements and improve the working environment. In doing so the change ended the storage of "a stupid amount of paper" ( $\theta$ ).

One participant explained that they were frustrated with the level of uncertainty regarding an issue, and that this uncertainty was causing discontent in the workplace. While not offering management a solution to a source of workplace IR conflict - this employee sought instead to 'manage' workplace IR conflict by seeking information for [themselves] and [their] colleagues.

"But if somebody comes to me about it I would say "Look you... " maybe I might make some suggestions because I suppose it's a lot of information may be coming up piecemeal and somebody might come to you for, kind of saying "Can you clarify this?" or that kind of thing so I'd hope to guide them a little bit"(Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

The use of soft voice as an expression of IR conflict was described in the context of the LMRS and the implementation of the extended working day. In all cases, employees articulated suggestions about how the new roster should work. Examples from  $\beta$  are provided below:

"... we'd a lot of discussion over moving to the 8-8 system... there was a bit of conflict with management over that at the time. People didn't really want to do it originally and then it was kind of said we had to do it so we had to come up with ideas for rotas and things and what suited everyone" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

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<sup>55</sup> While the conceptualisation of solutions as an expression of IR conflict is seemingly curious, In line with Barbash (1979), participants themselves this as an expression of workplace IR conflict. Further, a solution is predicated on the existence of a problem.

"... one of the major problems in relation that I foresaw at the beginning was that if my fingerprints were all over the rosters and all over the extended working day that I would have difficulty in selling it... I involved everybody over a three or four month period... so that they would have ownership of that roster ..." (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

While some considered soft voice the most positive expression of IR conflict, others viewed it as a dilution of the change initiative. In addition, soft voice caused discontent in some instances. These typically revolved around ignored suggestions where soft voice was dismissed as voicing discontent. A Senior Grade Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ) provided an example of this where, following a rejected solution, they were aggrieved and pursued defensive silence. The process is explained below:

"I have - actually I did, I did make one suggestion that - I made it to a lot of people and they have this hang up about it that they think it's something that wouldn't work or that - I think it would. I would feel they should be doing this procedure and they refuse because they think it'll cause havoc so prefer to have the havoc they've got" (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

While Hirschman (1970) focuses on voicing discontent as a response to decline, more recent conceptualisations of voice incorporate soft voice as the communication of ideas and suggestions (Bagchi, 2011; Budd, 2014). However, these writings do not focus on soft voice in the context of IR conflict. The findings suggest that both voicing discontent and soft voice are expressions of IR conflict. Difficulty seemed to arise for managerial participants in distinguishing between these forms of voice. However soft voice, as an expression of IR conflict, focuses on the identification and pursuit of solutions to issues of conflict in the workplace, while voicing discontent largely hinges on complaints where the power – or responsibility for remedy (see Gall & Hebdon, 2008:590) – rests with management.

#### WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT: THREAT RESPONSES AND EXPRESSIONS

In line with the qualitative approach, and integrated data analysis, IR conflict expressions evident in the case data were clustered into inductively derived categories: Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fix. These responses capture the variety of expressions in the case data, and – sensitive to the specificities of the employment relationship – recognise the connection between threat and the expression of IR conflict. Empirical descriptions were used to unbundle and re-classify IR conflict expressions into these response categories. Table 6.3 presents the responses and expressions of workplace IR conflict evident signalling existing viewpoints and proposed amendments. In addition, unbundled expressions are italicised.

Table 6.3: Workplace IR Conflict: Responses and Expressions

Response	Expression	Existing Viewpoints	Proposed Amendments
Flight, Freeze	Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unauthorized absence from work that can be considered a "negative reaction to the employer" (Bean, 1975:98)</li> <li>Voluntary and Involuntary (Taylor <i>et al.</i>, 2010)</li> <li>Used to withdraw (De Boer, 2002) and resist (Junor, 2009)</li> </ul>	<p>Absenteeism presents as unplanned non-attendance for scheduled work. Both involuntary and voluntary absenteeism are expressions of IR conflict where the former is related to workplace stress arising from IR conflict. Motives of voluntary absence to express IR conflict include: withdrawal; quid-pro-quo to rebalance exchange relations; resistance and; method displacement. Indicators include: patterned absence; absences preceding or following an authorised absence; self-certified and medically certified absence; inconsistent medical certification; medical certification focusing on workplace stress; and absence following a particular instance of workplace IR conflict, or arising in a setting exhibiting other expressions, or indicators of IR conflict.</p>
Flight	Annual Leave	-	<p>Annual leave is an expression of IR conflict used to escape the workplace and issues of IR conflict. When curtailed, an employee may substitute other expressions. Indicators may include the pattern of annual leave, and specifically the use of annual leave following an incident of workplace IR conflict.</p>
Flight	Neglect	"Failure to perform...duties either properly or with sufficient level of care" (Allen & Tüselmann, 2009:547)	<p>Neglect is a passive expression of IR conflict which involving the cognitive and behavioural withdrawal of care. No intentional harm of the organisation or workplace is pursued, rather - in an effort to rebalance the employment exchange - the aggrieved employee seeks to give less at work. This expression may accompany withdrawal of effort and commitment.</p>
Flight	Quitting	Voluntary termination of employment (Hirschman, 1970; Lewin, 2005)	<p>Quitting is an expression of IR conflict involving resignation of employment - or within a large organisation - requesting transfer. Quitting is heavily</p>

				influenced by labour market dynamics.
Freeze	Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace resistance - a wide variety of restrictive practices and non-strike expressions of IR conflict (Mullholland, 2004; Gall &amp; Hebdon, 2008)</li> <li>• Resistance to Change (Fox, 1966)</li> <li>• Resistance to Loss (Dent &amp; Goldberg, 1999)</li> </ul>		Resistance involves the refusal to accept or comply with management's practices or policies. Employees can resist change, loss and more. Further, resistance as revenge can arise when an employee resists in one area of the employment relationship as retribution for loss, change or more in other areas of the relationship. Resistance may be accompanied by voicing discontent; absenteeism; and withdrawal of cooperation. Soft voice may also be used to convince management of a more palatable solution.
Fight	Sabotage	Deliberate destructive behaviour in the workplace (Turkington, 1975; Analoui, 1995; Taylor & Walton, 1971 cited in Eldridge, 1973)		Sabotage, as an expression of IR conflict is the active intention and action to cause damage to the workplace. Employees may pursue sabotage by causing damage to machinery or other work products, through theft, or by causing intentional disruption to work flows and workplace functioning. Though sabotage is active and deliberate, it may not be premeditated and may be pursued due to frustration.
Flight	Silence	Withholding information, ideas or opinions from management (Van Dyne <i>et al.</i> , 2003; Lewin, 2008; Budd, 2014)		<i>Silence is an expression of IR conflict in the workplace hinging on the non-communication of discontent, or other pertinent information, to management. Silence can arise where employees are resigned to the issues of workplace discontent; fear retribution from voice; or feel that management 'should know' already. Social silence is also identified as an expression of IR conflict.</i>
Fix	Soft Voice	Communicating their ideas and opinions to management (Bagchi, 2011)		<i>Soft voice, as an expression of IR conflict in the workplace, involves communicating suggestions and solutions regarding issues of discontent in the workplace or the employment relationship. It may however appear as voicing discontent. The key distinction in this regard is the employee focus on fixing the issues of discontent rather than simply highlighting them.</i>
Fight	Strike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "A stoppage of work by a group of workers to express a</li> </ul>		The strike is a catastrophic and dramatic expression of IR

		<p>conflict" (Turkington, 1975:31)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The "traditional yardstick of workplace relations" (Drinkwater &amp; Ingram, 2005:373)</li> </ul>	<p>conflict involving a halt in production. The data indicates that strike action is only one of many expressions, and in this context is considered an extreme and costly option.</p>
Flight	Tardiness	<p>Deliberate lateness, and poor time keeping (Bean, 1975, Barbash, 1979)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An expression of workplace conflict (Richards, 2008)</li> <li>Bad mouthing and griping as a form of voice (Budd, 2014)</li> </ul>	<p>Tardiness relates to lateness in attending work at the beginning of the work shift, and following breaks. Indicators include patterns, and a change in behaviour.</p>
<i>Flight</i>	<i>Venting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication of discontent (Hirschman, 1970)</li> <li>Emphasis on union voice (Benson, 2000)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Venting, as an expression of workplace IR conflict, involves sideways communication of workplace discontent to colleagues, not management. This expression is typically accompanied by silence.</i></p>
Fight	Voicing Discontent		<p>Voicing discontent is an expression of IR conflict that involves upward communication of dissatisfaction or grievance in the workplace or employment relationship. Paths for communication can be direct or representative, formal or informal. Indicators include an escalation from one path to another: direct to representative, informal to formal.</p>
Flight, Freeze	Withdrawal	<p>Withdrawal of effort and cooperation (Barbash, 1979; Hebdon, 2005; Harrison <i>et al.</i>, 2001) as reduced performance and flexibility</p>	<p>Withdrawal as expression of IR conflict includes a reduction in effort, cooperation, or commitment. In addition, employees may become behaviourally introverted.</p> <p>Indicators include: poor performance; unhelpful behaviour; focus on fulfilment of contractual obligations; and a shift away from professional development, and/or social interaction. A change in behaviour is also a key indicator.</p>

*\*Italicised expressions, while evident in existing literature, were unbundled from broader expressions and reconsidered on their own merit*

## 6.4 CONCLUSIONS

Despite acknowledging the existence of many forms of IR conflict expression, the strike has been the focus of IR scholarly attention for many decades. In light of this overly narrow focus, this study sought to explore the nature and expression of workplace IR conflict using a qualitative methodology. Despite recent shifts toward quantitative and deductive methodologies, IR research has a longstanding tradition of qualitative, inductive and context-specific enquiry (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008). Further, while research on strikes has tended toward the objectivist and quantitative orientation (Franzosi, 1989), the usefulness of these approaches for the study of IR conflict has recently been called into question (Godard, 2011). Therefore, this approach was selected due to its appropriateness for the research objective.

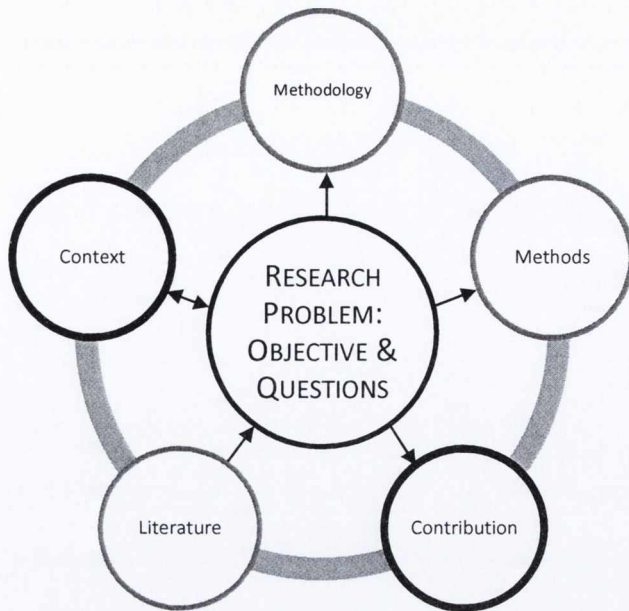
This Chapter, cognisant of the limitations of existing frameworks, presented a framework of inductively derived responses to workplace IR conflict: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fix. As demonstrated in Figure 6.1 these responses, grounded in the case data, are better suited to capturing the array of IR conflict expressions. Drawing on psycho-physiology literatures, these responses recognise the role of threat in IR conflict. In doing so, the framework captures the power imbalance and interdependence of the employment relationship – features which are notably absent from more general approaches.

This Chapter presents findings on the expressions of workplace IR conflict. The data confirms the existence of many expressions speculated on in existing literature. In addition, participants identified annual leave as an expression of IR conflict used to escape the workplace, and discontent in the employment relationship. The findings also unbundle and extend some of these expressions, further illustrating variation in the expression of IR conflict. In this regard, the findings confirm that the strike is but one of an array of IR conflict expressions. Further, participants described a particularly reluctant stance on the use of the strike. Against this menu of options, the foremost conclusion of this Chapter is that the preoccupation on the strike expression evident in IR research has serious limitations.

Attention now turns to the broader research objective, and second research question: the nature of workplace IR conflict, and the impact of IR conflict on the workplace. Thus the following chapter presents findings on the characteristics of IR conflict, its dynamics, development, and impact on the workplace. In addition, the Chapter will present findings on the role of the healthcare setting in this regard.

## CHAPTER 7

# THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING



### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in Chapter 1, this research sought to explore the nature or 'essence' (Berg, 2009) of workplace IR conflict in a healthcare setting. This objective was motivated by the narrow focus of existing research on the strike expression despite evidence of decline since the 1970s and, more importantly, the longstanding view that IR conflict is expressed in a variety of ways (Kerr, 1954). Recently Hebdon and Noh (2013:26, 43) write: "enquiries must be conducted into the nature of [industrial relations] workplace conflict and its dynamics", explaining that "[w]e know little about the nature of workplace conflict itself despite its fundamental importance to conflict management". Underpinning this objective, this qualitative study sought to answer two research questions: (i) how do employees express workplace IR conflict, and (ii) how do these expressions impact on the workplace. Chapter 6 presented findings on the first research question, how do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict? The findings confirm that, quite beyond the strike expression of IR conflict, employees express IR conflict in a variety of ways indicating that the emphasis of IR conflict literature on the strike is misplaced. The purpose of this chapter is to build upon these findings in order to address the research objective, and answer the second research question on the impact of IR conflict expressions on the workplace. Drawing on the analysis in Chapter 6, and further analysis of aggregate interview data, this chapter describes, analyses and explains the nature and impact of workplace IR conflict.

In this regard, the chapter will position the expression of IR conflict across a number of dimensions evident in existing literature. Building on this analysis, and the menu of IR conflict expressions presented in Chapter 6, the chapter provides insight into how employees choose between the variety of expressions. The compliments-substitutes debate, identified in Chapter 2,



is considered. In addition, the chapter suggests transmission mechanisms which promote employee coalescence around this menu of IR conflict expressions.

Cognisant of these transmission mechanisms which identify how individual expressions of IR conflict are replicated in the workplace, the chapter addresses the second research question: how does IR conflict impact on the workplace. Finally, cognisant of the context-specific nature of IR conflict (Barbash, 1979; Cappelli & McKersie, 1987) these findings are situated in the selected healthcare setting. The evidence suggests that context features - professionals, patients, and media - influence the nature of IR conflict.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 7.2 presents findings on the characteristics of IR conflict where the expression of IR conflict is positioned along dichotomies identifiable in the data including individual-collective (Edwards, 1986; Gall & Hebdon, 2008); overt-covert (Hebdon & Noh, 2013); and active-passive (Rusbult & Lowery, 1985). The diminishing role of the union as a route to the expression of IR conflict is also described. Section 7.3 considers the dynamics and development of IR conflict in the workplace. This section presents findings on how employees choose between the varied menu of IR conflict expressions, and how IR conflict is transmitted across the workplace. Section 7.4 presents findings on the second research question on how IR conflict expressions impact on the workplace. Finally, Section 7.5 considers findings on how the nature of IR conflict is influenced by features in this healthcare context.

## **7.2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

Many of the expressions presented in Chapter 6 departed from the dramatic strike expression that dominates existing literature. Instead, participants described a reluctance to engage in strike action and a preference for direct, non-union voice. As noted in Chapter 2, many authors consider IR conflict expressions along a variety of dimensions, including individual-collective (Edwards, 1986; Gall & Hebdon, 2008), overt-covert (Hebdon & Noh, 2013); and active-passive (Rusbult & Lowery, 1985). Building on the analysis presented in Chapter 6, and further iterative analysis of aggregate interview data, this section uses these dimensions to explore the characteristics of the IR conflict evident in the case data.

### **COLLECTIVE-INDIVIDUAL**

In response to the decline of the strike as the most collective expression of IR conflict, many authors have speculated on the redirection of IR conflict into more individual expressions (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014; Gall, 2013; Saundry & Dix, 2014). While there is some confusion surrounding the meaning of the individual-collective dimension, and implicit assumptions regarding union involvement, the individual-collective dimension is

considered here as the degree to which action is pursued by individual(s) acting independently, versus a group of employees acting in-concert or colluding on the expression of IR conflict, or how IR conflict is to be expressed. Thus, IR conflict may be individual where many employees express IR conflict in-parallel. Participants described an individual approach to IR conflict where the disparity and multiplicity of interests undermined the collective expression of IR conflict. While some participants explained that employees preferred an individualised approach to IR conflict due to a sense of empowerment or desire to conceal their IR conflict, others felt alone, afraid and unsupported. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"[colleague would] say the opposite, you know that way. You'd say we're after being really busy and [colleague would] say... 'What are you talking about? It's been so quiet'... you know, like instead of people sticking together. Sometimes at those meetings you feel like - not that the Lab Aides pull apart, but they don't stick together" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\gamma$ ).

"I was the first one that put in a formal complaint. Unfortunately though, as I kind of expected, I was left on my own to deal with it, I got no support from any other staff member even though they all knew what was going on... I was not going to get the backing, not only of my own colleagues, but also of management... It left me with the one route which was to just keep my head down... I had considered going to HR, but I kind of lost the fight of it, because I felt I was completely isolated on my own" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"...I felt particularly isolated... I brought up the points on behalf of other people but when I was isolated no-one was kind of coming in and saying 'Oh well we could maybe...' , you know, these are the very people that I'd just spoken to and now I was looking kind of left and right, kind of 'Would you help me?' but no-one did" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

The expressions of IR conflict evident in the case data were presented in Chapter 6: absenteeism, annual leave, neglect (-), quitting, resistance, sabotage (-), silence, soft voice, strike (-), tardiness, venting, voicing discontent, and withdrawal. While in line with Gall and Hebdon (2008) and Junor *et al.*, (2009), there was some evidence of semi-collective features, these expressions were described in a largely individual manner. Examples pertaining to absenteeism and voice are provided below.

"... absenteeism, it's a complex issue... but I would think that it is a manifestation alright of [IR conflict]. It's one of the signs of conflict. Absolutely, yeah, of conflict, yeah, but it is complex, you know, because it's down to individuals, it's [used] in different ways" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"I don't think so, I think, like, I'd still probably go to my own managers first, like, I wouldn't bypass them and go straight to the union and whatever like that if something did happen but I would probably have it in the back of my head that it probably will be going [too] far..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

Returning to an example provided in Chapter 6, a Phlebotomy Manager ( $\alpha$ ) explained that one employee was rigidly adhering to standards of practice (SOP) as outlined by the HSE and other relevant authorities. However, when a performance issue came to light it was found that a number of the SOPs were not clinically relevant in the specific context. Despite this the employee insisted on complying with regulations. However, this practice was not pursued by other phlebotomists in the workplace:

"... this Phlebotomist was doing a huge amount of documentation that wasn't required at all and of no value to anybody... and so that was... pointed out to [the employee]. But I suppose this person isn't willing to take on some of the observations and recommendations".

Providing further evidence of this individual approach, managerial participants identified the influence of personal preferences on the expression of IR conflict. The individual divergence in expressions of IR conflict was also described by employee participants. Examples are provided in the following quotes:

"Some of them say yeah, okay, we'll do it because you're the boss. Others just ignore it and just say... 'Well, I'm going when I'm going, when [manager is] not looking" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"They usually tell you. Oh, yeah, well, most of them, but then others will go and maybe talk to somebody else about it, but not come directly either to the senior in the department or to the Chief. Again it seems to be certain personalities" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

As noted, there is much speculation amongst IR scholars that IR conflict - in the absence of strikes - has become more individual (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014; Gall, 2013; Saundry and Dix, 2014). The data provides empirical support for this view, confirming that employees are favouring individualised expression of IR conflict. While some exhibited semi-collective characteristics (Gall & Hebdon, 2008) where employees shared issues (e.g. venting) and observed each other's behaviour, there was little evidence of collusion between employees. In recounting their expression of IR conflict in the workplace, employees did not describe "conscious and directed human action and interaction" (ibid:594). However, as demonstrated in Chapter 6 there was consistency of expression within and across cases where employees are individually pursuing the same expressions of IR conflict. Thus, the evidence suggests that while expressions were replicated *across* the collective, they were not replicated *by* the collective.

## OVERT-COVERT

The overt-covert dimension relates to the degree of visibility. To what extent do employees conceal their expressions of IR conflict, and to what degree can observed behaviour be attributed to the expression of IR conflict (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Perhaps related to fear of reprimand, participants explained that they express IR conflict 'by stealth':

"... talk amongst themselves... Informally... you would hear the coffee room talk..." (Clerical,  $\alpha$ ).

"... you know, that kind of thing, do it by stealth, you know, when they're not looking... and a lot of things are happening... unbeknownst to management and senior grades" (Basic Grade,  $\theta$ ).

Related to overt-covert dimension is the formal-informal distinction used to categorise voice expressions (Harlos, 2001). As noted in Chapter 6, employees described a progressive approach to formality where, at least in the first instance, informal voice was favoured. This informal approach was also evidenced with other expressions. Examples are provided in the following quotes:

"Like, it would be casual now... Like, we don't go straight for, like, the big guns, like, all the time, do you know that kind of way?" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"For the most part, it's people griping in a kind of covert way, so it's often sort of little huddles of colleagues sort of in a huddle berating the - between them, berating the manager" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"As soon as you stop then they start slacking back again so, you know, you'll say "Look, this is what we'll do, will you not make an official complaint?" but they actually don't want to make it official which I can understand because they are sitting down right next to these people" (Clerical,  $\beta$ ).

In some regards, expressions of workplace IR conflict evident in the data mirrored traditional forms of IR conflict in a more informal and covert ways. While go-slow and work-to-rule terms were used by participants, employees were not deploying these expressions in their traditional form. These behaviours, termed as withdrawal of effort and cooperation in Chapter 6, were described individually with no communication to management regarding the action, or its purpose. Further, these actions were not union-sanctioned. A Phlebotomy manager ( $\alpha$ ) noted that as a response to dissatisfaction in the workplace, and specifically staffing issues, employees may push back by pursuing a "... little bit of a go-slow to actually slow the pace really down". However, this participant was not informed of any go-slow action but rather felt, or observed, a decline in performance following an issue of workplace IR conflict. A Laboratory Manager ( $\theta$ ) commented on the same approach. However, consistent with the covert nature of these expressions and their limited visibility, this participant noted they could not identify a pattern:

"say the quality of their work and things like that, maybe just sometimes maybe a bit slower, but I don't really see any great pattern" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Evidenced by the use of grievances and representative voice (Ch.6), not all IR conflict in the case data was covert. However, the data indicates a preference for the covert and informal expression of IR conflict.

#### ACTIVE-PASSIVE

Participants explained that the nature of IR and IR conflict had changed<sup>56</sup> where employees - moving across the active-passive dimension of IR conflict (Rusbult & Lowery, 1985) - had "give[en] up the fight" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ). This view of change is illustrated in the following excerpts:

"I think the face of industrial relations has changed in the last number of years, I think there's less conflict. I think the Croke Park agreement brought an element of peace and stability... it's gone to medium [level of IR conflict] because I think there's a lot of - almost an air of resignation out there with employees, like you know, what's the point in fighting?..." (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

Participants attributed this move toward passivity to a shift in the broader contexts - economic and IR - which has moved away from the 'benevolent giver model of industrial relations' (HR/IR,  $\alpha$ ). It was argued that there was recognition of the economic realities facing HSE and hospital employers. As such, employees felt 'lucky to have a job' and avoided active, overt conflict in the employment relationship. Examples are provided below.

"... of course like you see conflict breaking out in a more traditional way now and again, but that would be my perception, that over a period of twenty years kind of attitudes between the two sides, have definitely changed and evolved" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"Yeah, they want to keep their head down and yeah - because they feel... the blame has been thrown at us for some reason... and then, like, it puts a bad flavour in their mouth in relation to the unions... It's like turning up for a war... and you're not going to fight. What are they going to do? Just say... 'okay, no fight!'" (Union Representative,  $\alpha$ ).

A HR/IR Manager ( $\beta$ ) explained that state-provided machinery, and specifically dispute resolution processes provided under the Public Service Agreements, have in [their] view precipitated a change from reactive, to considered and procedural conflict. Social Partnership was considered in the same manner where these changes have 'taken the fight out of employees'. Specifically, it was explained, as in Chapter 5, that employees - having never experienced local level bargaining or

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<sup>56</sup> While no longitudinal data is provided, in line with the phenomenological approach change in the nature of IR conflict is inferred from participants' assessment of IR conflict and how they express it. This is consistent with Pondy (1967) and participant driven identification of conflictful behaviour.

industrial action – had lost empowerment under Social Partnership (Union Representative,  $\alpha$ ). A HR/IR ( $\beta$ ) Manager offered a similar appraisal:

"... the HSE unions and the public service agreement has taken the fight out of [employees], you know - like, when I came... you'd get on a Friday evening from catering "We're walking off"... whereas definitely consultation periods and strike notice periods have had to go into that - ridding that kind of reactive behaviour..."

Participants also identified the national context and Irish identity as contributing to this non-reactive passive approach to IR conflict. It was explained that the Irish cultural model of compliance is embedded in the nation's expression of IR conflict. These views are illustrated below.

"I think there is that element that they complain but they do nothing about it... we're not a reactive society. We take it on the chin... the Irish historically will do nothing about it" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"... I think the decline in activity has been very much down to... this kind of cultural model of I think Irish people are still quite compliant, you know, you might think that we have our fists up fighting, we generally don't, you know. We've accepted the Troika, we've accepted so many things here in terms of the economy and where it's going, we're relatively compliant" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

In some instances participants explained that due to the economic and industry context, IR conflict had been reduced. A contrasting, and prevalent, view evident in the data was that IR conflict had 'gone underground'. This provides support for Godard (2011). Participants explained that while conflict was still present, it had become more intangible. This further signals the trend toward the covert expression of IR conflict. Different metaphors were used by participants to describe this change. Some of these are provided below:

"[i]t's gone underground like it's gone into the mumbling and grumbling sort of situation in the minor ways. I mean I suppose - I don't think people can afford to think of strike any more either for themselves or for their jobs, everything's under threat, isn't it?" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"... it's kind of like the French Revolution kind of bubbling underneath the surface kind of thing, you know, and something will trigger it off then and it'll explode but generally speaking, like, it's always there but maybe not as tangible as it was" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

"[t]here'd be a lot brewing underneath, with Croke Park 2 [PSA2] coming" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

As outlined, participants described individualised expression and explained that employees have lost the will to fight. This indicates a shift across Rusbult and Lowery's (1985) active-passive

dimension. In line with many of the expressions described in Chapter 6, the nature of IR conflict has become more passive. While for some this indicated a reduction in IR conflict, others explained - providing support for Godard (2011, 2014) - that conflict has moved underground and become more covert and informal. In this regard the findings suggest that employees may not have lost the fight but rather are choosing to fight differently. This is consistent with the varied expression of IR conflict presented in Chapter 6.

Reflecting on these dimensions of IR conflict, Figure 7.1 positions the expression of IR conflict as evident in the case data on the individual-collective, overt-covert/informal, and active-passive dimensions.

Figure 7.1: Dimensions of Workplace IR Conflict Expressions

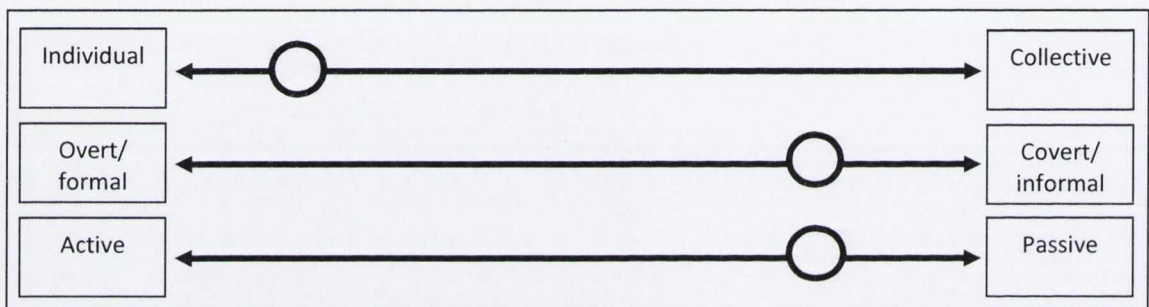
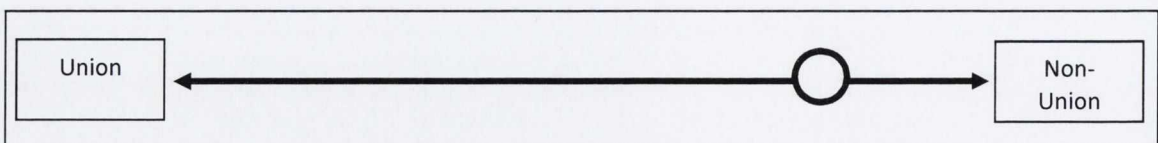


Figure 7.1, drawing on the data, illustrates that the nature of IR conflict in this case data is largely individual, covert or informal, and passive. These characteristics differ from the traditional view of IR conflict - with connotations of strikes and pickets - as collective, dramatic and adversarial. In reviewing these characteristics, the Trade Union is a notable absence. Thus, at this juncture a union–non-union dimension is introduced in Figure 7.2.

#### UNION–NON-UNION

Figure 7.2: Adding the Union/Non-Union Dimension of Workplace IR Conflict



In line with the changes in the nature of IR conflict presented above, the data suggests that IR conflict is becoming increasingly beyond the remit of unions. It should be noted however that in the context of 100% coverage, the union/non-union is a spectrum where expressions can coexist. Nevertheless, despite the evidence of discontent in the employment relationship, there seemed

to be apathy toward union engagement. This was evidenced with regard to the use of the strike and of union representative voice in Chapter 6. Further illustrations are provided below.

"To be honest, no, because you'd have to talk to [union rep]. Half the time, [union rep is] just going on and you switch off" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\theta$ ).

"... people aren't all that interested in the union... they aren't militant at all, yeah, they aren't... They do not tend to come to me. Now, because of - as I said, everybody's in the union, I don't want to be stirring up stuff" (Union Representative,  $\alpha$ ).

Union representatives explained that while there was IR conflict in the workplace, it was difficult to galvanise discontent into any form of overt/formal action in either individual or collective forms. Reflecting the shift toward passivity in the expression of workplace IR conflict, a union representative described the employee cohort as apathetic where they had 'no stomach for the fight' with management:

"... generally speaking, you would have to sort of encourage people to say like... 'Do you want the union to have a look at something... they would not go to the union representative... Absolutely not... They do not want to [fight], no, no... they would easily surrender conditions if there was no stress with it, you know, there was no - if you don't... fight for anything like, we just let it go, just surrender, it's easier than trying to put up any sort of fight... they wouldn't have the stomach for the fight like the nurses... turn up at one of our meetings and just see the apathy in the room, it's unbelievable, you know, so even when this stuff is coming down the tracks..." (Union Representative,  $\alpha$ ).

This apathy was noted by employees who described a preference for direct voice and reluctance to engage with Trade Unions. In addition, many employee participants were dissatisfied with Trade Unions in terms of the deal struck, and an overly pro-management stance. Managerial participants explained that this shift away from Trade Unions represented a change in the expression of IR conflict. According to these participants this trend was rooted in (i) a suppressed fight response due to PSA 1 and 2, and (ii) a decline in union leverage. The media was also identified as influential (see Section 6.5). Quotes are provided below to illustrate these viewpoints.

"I think *before* [speaker's emphasis] you would have gone to the union as a kind of first off step... I think a lot of people have kind of - are probably realising that they're relatively lucky to be in employment but I think the unions have less leverage than they had before" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

"I think unions have less leverage and less power. I think that's especially... the administrative grade, you know like, the Impact Trade Union there's not a whole lot that a union can put on the table for you collectively... if you're an individual case and you're telling me that I haven't paid you properly - legislation then - and you'll get something..." (HR/IR,  $\alpha$ ).



"I don't - I presume people could contact their unions. I've seen that in England where people have said... 'I'm contacting the union'... and you know, that kind of thing. Not [here] really, no" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

The seeming decline in union leverage also arose in relation to union membership. While the healthcare context is known for exhibiting high union density and coverage (Farrelly, 2009), participants included and made reference to non-members of Trade Unions. Some put forward strong ideological reasons for non-membership, while others identified unions as ineffective. Despite these views, some participants thought that non-membership closed avenues for voice. Against this backdrop of diverging views on Trade Unions, it was recognised by managerial participants that unions were struggling to recruit. These differing accounts are illustrated in the following quotes:

"I think the main tension that came in, in terms of strike action and everything that was going to start was, because I think a lot of people aren't in the Union, I'd say it's maybe 50/50 in some labs... what were the people who weren't in the Unions going to do... we can't strike because we could get disciplinary action if we did" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I think what's wrong is the person isn't a member of the Union so, you know, maybe they feel nowhere to go"(Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"... Unions are constantly trying to recruit people... I think the Union probably rightly, uses [IR conflict dispute as] an opportunity to make themselves more relevant" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"I think a lot of people nowadays are not members of their...Trade Unions because they feel they don't need that back-up" (Principal Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

A HR/IR Manager ( $\gamma$ ) explained that in many ways the passive and non-union shifts in the nature of workplace IR conflict are best demonstrated with reference to participant views of the strike. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ) commented:

"... I don't know, no [a strike] wouldn't be something - and I could probably say that's probably the way for most of colleagues which may make us sound weak... we wouldn't stand up for [a strike]".

This issue, introduced in Chapter 6, is considered further here. Despite the focus of IR conflict literature on the topic of strike action, evidence from the interview data suggests that there is significant reluctance to pursue it. Participants presented a number of rationales for this position. These centred on the cost of strike action and insufficient solidarity. In addition, the influence of context features was evident (see Section 7.5).

Employees attributed a reluctance to engage in strike action to the personal financial cost, which was in turn heavily linked to the economic context. Participants explained that they had lost a

significant amount of money in recent times and that despite their image as highly paid, highly educated professionals, many struggled to make ends meet. Consequently a view emerged that employees 'could not afford to strike':

"I think a lot of people just suffer because a lot of people financially can't afford to strike... I think a lot of people are just so happy financially to have a job... they don't want to strike or - even though they might feel upset, they can't afford to complain anymore" (Administrative Staff,  $\gamma$ ).

"Well it's not that people don't want to strike it's that if you strike you don't get paid. So, the last time that we, probably a year and a half ago, that we asked people were they prepared to go on strike - a lot of people have families, they've another member of their family who used to have a job is now not working, and as they would say they cannot afford to not be paid for two days while they're out. They assume the government would love it because it's two days' pay that they don't have to pay" (Union Representative,  $\beta$ ).

Participants also identified non-financial costs including personal time and emotional investment. Specifically, it seemed that strike action was considered a lot of 'hassle'. Similarly, engaging with the minutia of management and union proposals was - for most - not a priority:

"We had a vote last week on the Croke Park 2 and from here *two* [speaker emphasis] people went to it... I know for a fact they hadn't read the proposal. So people sometimes do kind of want to just like go in, do their job, get paid and not want to worry about anything else... they don't want to have the hassle of going out on strike, so I suppose that was kind of a big thing... that change[d]" (Union Representative,  $\gamma$ ).

While some union representatives found the degree of apathy toward strike action - or any action - difficult, others offered a sceptical view regarding the effectiveness of the strike - typically considered a cornerstone in the union arsenal. This is reflective of the confusion identified in how union representatives conceptualise their role. While some consider it in terms of advocacy, they moderate their involvement to avoid 'stirring conflict' (Union Representative,  $\gamma$ ). Others, however, see themselves as conciliatory where their role hinges on bringing employees and management together. This contrasts with traditional paradigms where, at least in the unitarist framework, fusing management and employee interests is the remit of management - not unions. Illustrations of this view are provided below:

"strike doesn't really achieve anything and I think that's - if people have learned anything they've probably learned... that through the years, that strike just doesn't seem... to work and particularly now what are you going to be striking over? Striking over - pay cuts... unless you're totally naïve the government is trying to balance their books, so what can they do with a strike?" (Union Representative,  $\beta$ ).

"You want to bring them into the fold... You want everybody to be together to discuss it... you have to bring them together, so that's the first thing" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

The lack of solidarity amongst employees was a critical factor identified by participants in

explaining their anti-strike position. This issue was also evident in the approval of PSA 1. While many scientists lost significant earnings from revised on-call payments, many - who did not do on-call work - were untouched by this change. The vote regarding PSA 1 was, according to some participants, pushed through by this latter group. Following threats of non-payment of compensation for loss of earnings under the LMRS, employees spoke of a break - even within the affected cohort. While some participants were pro-strike, many employees - and union representatives - were very reluctant. Examples are provided below.

"... so there was talks of strike. Not everyone was in favour of strike. There were some people at that meeting that just kind of sat there and said... 'Yeah, no, we haven't got our money [but] we have no appetite for industrial action'... and I was just like... 'I'm sorry, but if you tell these people that you have no appetite for industrial action, then you're not going to get your money, are you?'" (Union Representative, γ).

"I said... 'You can't win'... I said... 'Look, you tried, it's like blood out of a stone. You go up there and you try and negotiate and you come to some compromise. They don't have the money, they're telling me they haven't all the money, what do you want to do? Strike over it?' I says... 'No point striking because you're on-call. How many people are on-call here? Not many, so how many people are on-call and members? Even less. What is the point? They don't care'. You can't do it" (Union Representative, θ).

Providing further support for the individualisation of IR conflict, these excerpts illustrate the divides between employees in the workplace. The data signals limited solidarity amongst these employees in general, and particularly in relation to strike action. Participants also described a lack of socialising amongst the Medlab group. This issue, directly contrasting with the high level of socialising described amongst 1969 Medlab employees (Devine, 2012). This issue was attributed to the extended working day. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist (γ) commented:

"... people are still blaming lack of the social side of work on the eight to eight – like 'cause... people used to go out... on Fridays to the pub after work and have a chat and they might only stay for one and go home at six, but it was kind of a way of bonding with your staff, [your] colleagues, but now with the eight to eight, someone's finished at half three, someone else is finished at six, someone else finished at eight, everyone's working different hours...so there's never - people give out that there's much less kind of nights out and bonding".

The view that there was 'no appetite for industrial action' is significant when it is considered that this view was articulated following national level pay cuts; an extended working day; revised on-call payments; and non-payment of compensation awarded by the Labour Court. This is indicative of the trend toward passive IR conflict, and an inability of union representatives to collectivise their members.

Table 7.1 demonstrates how these characteristics are rooted in the case data. Excerpts of data are provided on the left while interpretive analysis of this data is presented in the right column. These

characteristics are related and mutually re-enforcing. While in line with the array of expressions presented in Chapter 6, there are some instances of more collective, overt, active or unionised IR conflict, the characteristics presented provide the best fit with the data.

Table 7.1: The Characteristics of Workplace Industrial Relations Conflict

Units of Meaning	Interpretation/ Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... conflict... it is complex, you know, because it's down to individuals, it's different in different ways"</li> <li>• "I got no support from any other staff member even though they all knew what was going on... I had considered going to HR, but I kind of lost the fight of it, because I felt I was completely isolated on my own"</li> </ul>	Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I would actually hate for one of them to turn up at one of our meetings and just see the apathy in the room, it's unbelievable, you know, so even when this stuff is coming down the tracks"</li> <li>• "... there's a lot of - almost an air of resignation out there with employees, like you know, what's the point in fighting?... "</li> <li>• "just rolled over and played dead for the HSE and just did the dutiful little thing and did what they were told instead of fighting for it"</li> </ul>	Passive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "It's kind of bubbling below the surface. It's kind of... when there is any kind of conflict situation arising in other departments, it never really escalates to an all-out blow-out"</li> <li>• "For the most part, it's people griping in a kind of covert way, so it's often sort of little huddles of colleagues sort of in a huddle berating the manager"</li> </ul>	Covert & Informal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The union was strong. The union was strong, we were fairly unionised up to five/six years ago. Nowadays the union is just a figurehead, you know, it's lost its power and management know that"</li> <li>• "... I think <i>before</i> you would have gone to the union as a kind of first off step"</li> <li>• "I think a lot of people nowadays are not members of their union, of Trade Unions because they feel they don't need that back-up"</li> </ul>	Non-Union

As presented in Table 7.1, the findings suggest that the nature of workplace IR conflict is becoming more passive, individual, covert, informal, and non-union. These characteristics depart from our traditional view of IR conflict. The findings substantiate the speculation in IR literature that IR conflict has become more individualised (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014; Gall, 2013; Saundry and Dix, 2014) by providing empirical evidence that IR conflict is moving away from collectivised, unionised and overt traditions. This further confirms that the focus of IR research on the strike is ill founded. Secondly, in the context of the trend toward covert expression where the employee objective is to express IR conflict in an undetectable manner, the value of quantitative methods in researching IR conflict is further undermined.

At this juncture this author considers the dynamics and development of IR conflict in the workplace. Specifically, the factors influencing how employees choose between the range of IR

conflict expressions are considered. Further, in light of the individualised and non-union characteristics of IR conflict, mechanisms promoting consistency around the menu of expressions are identified.

### **7.3 THE DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

As noted in Chapter 2, little is known about the relationships between expressions of IR conflict where studies tend to focus on one at a time (Hebdon & Noh, 2013). However some authors have suggested relationships between two expressions (e.g. Lewin & Ichniowski, 1986; Hirschman, 1970). Most recently Hebdon and Noh (2013) consider links between grievances, collective job actions, and strikes. To explore these issues further, findings are presented on how employees choose from the menu of IR conflict expressions, and how these types of IR conflict expressions are transmitted across the workplace despite individualised, and non-union expression.

#### **CHOOSING BETWEEN EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT**

A wide variety of IR conflict expressions were identified and described in Chapter 6. The data indicates that employees evaluate this menu of options with reference to the relative supply, utility, and cost of expressions. The appraisal of these factors is, in line with the individualisation of IR conflict, influenced by individual and professional preferences. Table 7.2 presents excerpts of data as units of meaning on the left and the interpretive analysis of this data on the right.

Table 7.2: Choosing Between Expressions - The Market for Workplace IR Conflict Expressions

Units of Meaning	Interpretation /Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "... how do people cope with [IR Conflict]? They leave. Yeah, when they can. When there's jobs, yeah!"</li> <li>• "That's why sick leave is chronic in a lot of the areas, you can't get [annual leave] because you can't get people to cover... well if that's the case, I'll go sick"</li> </ul>	Supply
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I don't think people can afford to think of strike anymore... "</li> <li>• "... if there's a conflict, especially if it's between management and staff, it's kind of like you're giving them more fuel if you do something like that [tardiness]..."</li> </ul>	Cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I can see other people going to the manager for help and they're not really getting anywhere so no, I probably wouldn't"</li> <li>• "... maybe in the past - people say... 'we'll go out on strike and we'll get something out of it'. Now they're saying... 'We'll go out on strike and we'll be standing in the cold'"</li> </ul>	Utility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Some of them say yeah, okay, we'll do it because you're the boss. Others just ignore it and just say... 'Well, I'm going when I'm going, when [manager is] not looking"</li> <li>• "They usually tell you. Oh, yeah, well, most of them, but then others will go and maybe talk to somebody else about it, but not come directly either to the senior in the department or to the Chief. Again it seems to be certain personalities "</li> </ul>	Preferences

### The Supply of Expressions

Hirschman's (1970) framework asserts that, faced with decline, employees chose between exit (quit) and voice where the key factor determining this choice is loyalty or attachment to the firm. However, it is acknowledged by Hirschman that exit must be a viable option (see Boroff & Lewin, 1997). As indicated in Chapter 6, participants explained that quitting in the current economic environment is not viable for most employees in the context of limited alternative employment for Medlab scientists. These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"I'm so lucky [to have a job here], but I'm not earning the same amount that I did in the private sector... There's no large private hospital-based labs in the country" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I've had other labs... I've worked in where the individuals have really been people who simply shouldn't have been put in charge and how do people cope with that? They leave. Yeah, when they can. When there's jobs, yeah!" (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

A Senior Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ) explained that "[i]f you can't leave then you're going to have to slog it out, it won't kill you hopefully...". In response to the hindsight question (see Chapter 4) this participant explained that they would have used the quit expression but now realise that the economic context precludes this option. This indicates that the supply of alternative employment

is a key factor in choosing between quitting and other IR conflict expressions. However, these dynamics were also evident in choosing between expressions *within* the workplace where employees assessed the relative supply of expressions.

The influence of relative supply on the expression of IR conflict is evident in the use of annual leave as an expression of IR conflict. Access to annual leave was described across the cases as a central issue of workplace IR conflict. In addition, the use of annual leave was described as an expression of IR conflict where employees – feeling trapped – used annual leave to escape from the workplace.

However, in the context of a labour-intensive frontline environment and an unpredictable level of absenteeism, annual leave was sometimes curtailed by management. Access was further restricted in the context of the 8-8 extended working day where the same manpower was used to cover a longer working period. Time off corresponding to shift patterns also had to be facilitated. Thus, staffing levels were often stretched - particularly where maternity leave, retirees, or employees on long term sick leave had not been replaced. Against this backdrop, the findings indicate that the supply of annual leave relative to other expressions influenced the choice of IR conflict expression. These dynamics are illustrated in the following quotes:

"It's an absenteeism problem... I've had to tell people that they can't have holidays, I can only allow so many people off..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"... You can't get the time off so what do you do? You go sick" (Support Staff,  $\alpha$ ).

In a similar vein, the data indicated that when opportunities for voice are limited, or perceived as limited, employees opt for silence and venting. Perhaps most interesting, was the view that venting was 'the only outlet'. This participant - purveyor of union voice - elaborated:

"I'm not sure, like, because I think that's the only outlet they have. They can't shout at the hospital, so they'll shout at [Lab Manager], do you know what I mean? They need somebody to vent their thing to, that's what I'm seeing" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

This data provides support for Gall and Hebdon's (2008) concept of method displacement. When one expression is low in supply, an employee must substitute another expression. This has implications for conflict management where suppression of one expression can have untold consequences if the pattern of substitution is not predicted.

### **The Utility of Expressions**

Participants, in describing their expression of workplace IR conflict or that of their colleagues, frequently discussed the utility or effectiveness of expressions. As noted in Section 7.2,

participants focused on the current climate explaining that strike action - whilst previously effective - would not receive public support. This argument was linked to the role of the media in the Irish healthcare setting, and will be reviewed further in Section 7.5.

"Yeah, yeah [*pause*]. It hasn't gone away, it definitely hasn't gone away... there's a reluctance to go out on the streets because they feel you won't get support, so I think that has held people back. So I think it's where your priorities focus on and maybe in the past - people say... 'we'll go out on strike and we'll get something out of it.' Now they're saying... 'We'll go out on strike and we'll be standing in the cold'" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Some participants explained that voicing discontent would not be effective in resolving the substance of discontent and as such did not pursue this expression. Employee assessments of the effectiveness of expressions are influenced by their own experience and/or that of colleagues. A Medical Lab Aide ( $\gamma$ ) explained that they would not pursue voice because this recourse had proved ineffective for [their] colleagues:

"I wouldn't go to a line manager... I can see other people going to the manager for help and they're not really getting anywhere so no, I probably wouldn't".

In contrast, some respondents held confident views about the efficacy of direct voice, believing that - based on their experience - direct voice was an avenue to 'fixing' the source of workplace IR conflict. Illustrating this view, a Medical Lab Aide ( $\theta$ ) stated:

"No. Everything can be sorted once you say it to them. If you're not saying it... I suppose, it's like everything else, if you don't say it to something to somebody, well, they don't know what's going on. It can't be fixed".

Interestingly, departing from Freeman and Medoff's (1984) view of the union role where voice is a central component, a Union representative ( $\theta$ ) articulated the view that nothing can be done to 'fix' issues of discontent in the workplace, so complaining to management is not an attractive option. When 'voicing discontent' and internal grievance procedures were deemed ineffective, employees indicated they subsequently pursued other means of expression including silence, venting, and withdrawal of commitment. These dynamics are evident in the quotes below.

"I suppose people would complain... They would look unhappy and probably would voice the opinion that they're unhappy, yeah. Probably more so to their colleagues because, as I said, you can complain to the manager but there's not a lot that can be done because our problem in here is lack of staff..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist and Union,  $\gamma$ ).

"We'd talk about it among ourselves and you can see that aggression coming out - But let's say, people have gotten to the point where they think it's a futile effort trying to do anything about it because no matter what you do, it falls on deaf ears, so people just go



about their business completely frustrated, completely apathetic and, you know, clock in their hours" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

Providing support for Harlos' (2001) concept of deaf ear syndrome - referenced by the Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) above - acquiescent silence was used when, despite previous attempts or the attempts of colleagues to voice discontent, resolution was not forthcoming. A Phlebotomist ( $\beta$ ) offered an illustration where, following a series of complaints to management, employees realised that "nobody was listening" and consequently pursued silence. The same dynamic was applied to the fix response. Following the use of soft voice where the outcome was unfavourable, participants explained that they pursued other expressions based on the conclusion that soft voice was ineffective. Quotations are provided below.

"Not unless I was asked [for my opinion]. I have - actually I did, I did make one suggestion that - I made it to a lot of people and they have this hang-up about it that they think it's something that wouldn't work or that - I think it would" (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I haven't gone to [lab] meetings since then, yeah, that was probably [number of] years ago" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

In the excerpts above, participants described examples where soft voice was ineffective. Consequently, both of these employees - of different grades and in different cases - pursued flight responses.

These findings indicate that, when choosing between expressions of IR conflict, effectiveness or utility of an expression itself and relative to that of other expressions is a factor. This is consistent with Stern (1964) who argued that the seeming demise of strike activity was attributable to the declining utility of the strike in the context of improved dispute resolution and societal dissatisfaction with strike activity. Reminiscent of this view, participants explained that the strike would not be effective in the current climate. In addition, they described many instances where voicing discontent and soft voice were ineffective. In this regard, the data supports Hirschman's proposition that the use of voice over exit is determined by employee (or customer) assessments of their ability to influence change (see Boroff & Lewin, 1997). However, instead of exit - as in Hirschman's framework (1970), participants explained that they used other flight responses (e.g. silence, venting and withdrawal). While seemingly illogical to choose silence or venting over voicing discontent based on limited effectiveness, the decision is based not simply on the relative efficacy of these expressions. The relative cost of expressions is also a consideration. Findings in this regard are presented in the following section.

## The Cost of Expressions

The issue of cost as it pertained to the expression of workplace IR conflict was largely discussed in relation to the strike. Participants explained that employees could 'no longer afford to go on strike'. Costs of strike action, including lost income, time, emotional investment - referred to as 'hassle', and media were considered high. Facing these costs, participants described the use of less costly expressions such as venting:

"I think a lot of people just suffer because a lot of people financially can't afford to strike... I think a lot of people are just so happy financially to have a job... they don't want to strike or - even though they might feel upset, they can't afford to complain anymore" (Administrative Staff,  $\gamma$ ).

"I don't know it's [workplace IR conflict] gone underground like it's gone into the mumbling and grumbling sort of situation in the minor ways. I mean I suppose - I don't think people can afford to think of strike anymore..." (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Cost was also described in the context of voicing discontent. In many instances employees explained that they pursued defensive silence, fearing costs of retribution, dismissal or a delay in career advancement. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ), cognisant of this possibility, pursued direct voice despite the potential costs involved due to a broader fear of legal ramifications arising from errors where these costs exceeded that of delayed career progression. In this regard, the participant feared the consequences of errors more than the cost of complaining, but also explained that it was not in their nature to stay 'silent'. Another employee ( $\theta$ ) held a different view, describing how they pursued silence following a dispute with a line manager because complaining would be too costly long term. This was consistent with many accounts of employees who, having pursued complaints against line managers, would recommend against such recourse where costs outweighed benefit. These dynamics, and competing viewpoints, are illustrated in the following quotations:

"... so that's why I was covering myself there... if anything goes to court... they look to see what name's attached to it and you'll be the one in the firing line... It probably was a bad move on me, you see nobody kind of stands up and fights... so I was probably overstepping seniors by going to the lab manager and... I'd say I've shot myself in the foot for... any promotion I've probably my name blackened a bit" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"... right, think strategically about this, you know, do I want to - I don't know, I have another few years to work with the person [line manager] in question and that person in question could make my life an absolute misery" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

As noted in Chapter 6, absenteeism is an expression of IR conflict in both involuntary and voluntary forms. Participants identified, amongst others, self-certified absenteeism as indicative

of voluntary absence. However, recent changes in HSE policy have reduced the number of allowable self-certified absences. Some participants explained that these changes would reduce absenteeism, while others argued that the policy would not put off 'hard core offenders' (Union,  $\theta$ ). The issue of cost is central to this debate. In essence, the policy increases the cost of absenteeism by imposing penalties for excessive self-certified absences, or by requiring employees to obtain medical certificates where a cost is imposed by the healthcare provider. These contrasting views are presented below.

"... that's something that management would have kind of tightened up an awful lot. I suppose nationally the number of sick days have been decreased... so I think people are probably more unlikely to [go sick]" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"But now, you know, things are changing in the HSE, you have to have these back to work interviews and stuff, that's putting people off a little bit, but it won't put the hardcore off. The hardcore will still do it" (Union,  $\theta$ ).

Thus, the data indicates that the cost, and relative cost of expressions influence how employees how employees express IR conflict. This is the inherent logic of dispute resolution machinery, the purpose of which was to provide a less costly means of dispute resolution – and in doing so increase the relative cost of the strike expression to employees and unions. However, as with the restriction of supply, the data confirms that 'method displacement' (Gall & Hebdon, 2008) arises.

### **Preferences**

In addition to these factors, there was evidence to suggest that, in line with the individualisation of IR conflict, individual preferences influence how employees choose between expressions. More specifically, individual preferences influence how an employee evaluates the supply, utility, and cost of expressions. While some considered voice effective, others saw these attempts as futile. Some participants considered the cost of voicing discontent – in terms of career progression – to be justified, while others considered it too costly. A Senior Grade Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ), considering the uncertainty surrounding redeployment under LMRS, placed emphasis on the need for employment irrespective of IR conflict. In contrast, a Medical Lab Aide ( $\theta$ ) from the same case considered redeployment as a cause for resignation. These accounts are provided below:

"I think people are very concerned about it... how do you fit that round your own life if the job that you are offered is a long way away... Obviously, most of us still need to work, there's nobody who can say... 'okay, I don't need a job'... because we wouldn't be here now if we didn't need a job..." (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"I really don't think I could move anywhere because I have a [child]. I couldn't possibly up and move anywhere, you know, [child is] in school. I couldn't even think about it. I'll probably have to look for another job. It just wouldn't be feasible for me to do that" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\theta$ ).

From the above, it can be seen that different employees face different circumstances which influence their expression of IR conflict. Different individuals, and different occupational groups, will face different labour markets influencing the supply of alternative employment and the viability of exit. Similarly, costs will differ where one employee has higher sunk costs and exhibits higher 'motivational investment'<sup>57</sup> (Emerson, 1962). While Medlab scientists face limited alternative employment, Medical Lab Aides and Support Staff have more alternatives and - in the absence of extensive training - may<sup>58</sup> exhibit lower levels of attachment and use quitting or voicing discontent more readily. Thus, quitting - or voicing discontent - may be more costly for one employee than another.

This section considered how employees choose between the varied menu of expressions available. Key factors influencing employee choice were evident in the data: the supply, utility, and cost of each expression on their own merit and relative to all other expressions. The data provides support for Hirschman (1970) who acknowledged that viability of exit and ability to effect change through voice were considerations in the E-L-V dynamic. Similarly, the findings are consistent with Lewin and Ichniowski (1986) who argue that employees compare the cost and effectiveness of grievances to quitting. However, the findings demonstrate that these dynamics extend beyond exit (quitting) and voice (grievances), and apply to the wider menu of expressions evident in the workplace. Therefore, the supply of expressions *within* the workplace is also a consideration. Thus, in line with Scheuer (2006), the findings indicate that employees use a 'novel calculus' not only in their use of the strike expression but rather in evaluating their broader menu of IR conflict expressions. Considering these factors - and the role of individual preferences - the findings suggest that expressions of IR conflict will be complements for some employees, and substitutes for others. This dynamic may also be influenced by the level or intensity of IR conflict perceived by the individual employee.

Departing somewhat from the traditional IR view, these findings further emphasise the role of the individual in the expression of IR conflict. However, in line with symbolic interactionism underpinning the interpretive approach, this is not to underestimate the influence of social and workplace context in influencing the expression of IR conflict. Therefore, the following section considers how individual action is replicated across the workplace collective.

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<sup>57</sup> These factors inform 'loyalty' (Hirschman, 1980), or the level of employee 'motivational investment' (Emerson, 1962)

<sup>58</sup> The variation of individual preferences - and the factors influencing individual preferences are likely extensive. Thus, prediction of individual behaviour is - in the absence of *ceteris paribus* reductionist assumptions - particularly challenging and beyond the remit of this study.

## THE COALESCENCE OF THE EXPRESSIONS OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT

In Chapter 6, the findings demonstrate that while employees use a variety of IR conflict expressions in a variety of ways for a variety of motives, there is consistency in the menu of expressions used - both within and across the four case sites. However, findings in Section 7.2 and above highlight the role of the individual in expressing IR conflict, where the role of the union in directing this behaviour is seemingly in decline. In the case data, IR conflict is on the one hand pursued on a largely individual and independent basis, and on the other expressed in a consistent set of behaviours. This suggests that employees are acting in-parallel rather than in-concert. This section explores how IR conflict expressions are replicated *across* the collective, but not *by* the collective. This issue of how IR conflict is transmitted, or developed, in the workplace has recently been acknowledged as a major gap in IR discourse (Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). In response, Hebdon and Noh (2013) have, in their quantitative study, found evidence of escalation where grievances are positively associated with collective job actions, and job actions are positively associated with strike action. The case data suggests a number of transmission mechanisms where expressions of IR conflict pursued on an individual basis are replicated across the workplace.

### **Non-Resolution of Workplace IR Conflict: Escalation and De-Escalation**

The previous section demonstrated that employees choose IR conflict expressions based on a number of factors including utility, or effectiveness. Participants explained that if expressions were unsuccessful in securing resolution, they would opt for a different course of action. Thus the data suggests that non-resolution can, in line with Hebdon & Noh (2013), trigger escalation of expression. This is further evidenced by employee preference for gradually increasing formality and moving from direct to representative voice expressions. Examples are provided in the following quotes:

"... the lab manager wasn't listening... it was like [lab manager had] only heard it for the first time every single time you went to talk to [lab manager]... I took it upon myself to [*laughs*] - I was emailing the lab manager every day when there was less - only one or two people in the lab... [lab manager] got me to come in because it was in writing. [Lab manager] didn't like it because it was in writing" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"I think they felt they had to bring the union rep. I can't understand - like, I suppose they didn't feel maybe that I had maybe plugged it enough, I don't really know. Like, I had shown them the letters that I had sent to the hospital manager and [hospital manager's] reply, but I suppose maybe they just felt that it might be better with - have just more weight to it if the union rep was there" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

However, the case data also indicates that non-resolution can also trigger de-escalation. In such circumstances, an employee holding the view that a particular expression is ineffective may pursue more passive responses where the objective becomes coping with, rather than resolving, conflict:

"... the reaction was not what I expected... I'd say when [colleagues] heard the reaction from other people to that - to what I thought was a very actually benign kind of argument, obviously they... didn't want to get involved. I couldn't blame them [*laughs*]... Yeah, I haven't gone to [lab] meetings since..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

This is consistent with acquiescent silence where employees become resigned to the issues of discontent in the workplace and feel powerless to change them. Moving toward more passive expressions is also in line with findings on the passivisation of IR conflict, and indicative of a fear of discipline or dismissal. In many regards, escalation or de-escalation involves re-assessment of the expressions of IR conflict in terms of supply, utility, and cost. Individual preferences, influencing the assessment of these factors, are likely to influence whether an employee interprets escalation as warranted. Further, observations of non-resolution following colleagues' expression of IR conflict informed employees' assessment of utility. These dynamics are evident below.

"... the structures are very difficult to dismantle and the layers and layers of bureaucracy are hugely [difficult] - and people get cynical because of that then and that cynicism percolates up and percolates down I think really, you know, from within the ranks" (Laboratory Manager,  $\beta$ ).

"I wouldn't go to a line manager... I can see other people going to the manager for help and they're not really getting anywhere so no, I probably wouldn't" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\gamma$ ).

The data suggests that IR conflict and its expression is transmitted across the collective through non-resolution of IR conflict. This is consistent with the repeated game and process dynamics of IR conflict where employees, and their observing colleagues, integrate non-resolution outcomes into assessments of IR conflict expressions. The findings confirm those of Hebden and Noh (2013) where employees can respond to non-resolution through escalation. However, in addition, employees can de-escalate their response choosing more passive and covert expressions.

### **Contagion Effects**

Existing research on strike activity has noted the contagious properties of strike action (Brecher, 2000; Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2008). This contagious property was also evident in the case data, often referred to by participants as 'knock-on effects'. While some specific links were identified by participants regarding the spread of discontent in the employment relationship (below), a broader

theme of contagion was identified where IR conflict - rather than any particular expression - spreads within the employment relationship. Participants described the contagion of IR conflict as an atmosphere or tension where there was no tangible indicator, but rather that IR conflict was 'in the ether' (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ). This is illustrated in the following quotations:

"Conflict is very - if somebody was really annoyed with somebody, it has a ripple effect, you know what I mean..." (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

"I think generally a lot of people... just get so wound up basically, get sometimes wound up by very little and a sense of injustice and... it becomes kind of like a whirring around circle of... discontent and I've seen that happen" (HR/IR, $\beta$ ).

As noted in Chapter 6, conflict originating in the employment relationship often spread to interpersonal relationships between colleagues. In this regard the identification of IR conflict becomes more difficult. The quotes provided below demonstrate this dynamic.

"... it was... coming downward but... then just spread out amongst colleagues" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"I noticed other things though, because of [former manager's] nature, [their] same type of mannerisms and attitude kind of started to rub off on other members of staff, so there was an awful lot of, I suppose, how would you put it... [pause] negativity in the department... It infected the department..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

Contagion was also evident beyond the boundary of the workplace and the organisation where the data suggests that the healthcare setting is particularly connected. This contagion dynamic, demonstrated in the following quotes, was evident in both inward and outward directions:

"It probably goes in different cycles, you know, so because we're a large publicly-funded organisation, if there's conflict at national level, that will have a knock-on effect here" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"... that had a major - would have major potential knock-on effects as well if you know what I mean, you know, so - you know, if you give something big to a - what that individual was looking for couldn't possibly impact the whole [country]" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

This contagion, or knock-on, dynamic was particularly evident in the data where an individual expression of IR conflict has implications for other colleagues. This seemed to create additional conflict in the employment relationship, or exacerbate an existing one. A Senior Grade Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ) provided an example where a local laboratory had transferred work to their laboratory. Management specified a target for redeployment, however, no compulsory redeployment took place. An excerpt is provided below.

"Yes, they did [stay]. There is some work. I think they're relatively busy in the mornings. They're not in the afternoon... they needed 85% - 80% to come... they just said no basically" (Senior Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Following this transfer of work - without staff resources - employees in  $\gamma$  case, experiencing a significant increase in workload, responded through freeze expressions and specifically resistance to more. This demonstrates an interesting contagion dynamic where resistance to change (redeployment) in one lab provokes resistance to more in another. These dynamics were often described in relation to absenteeism where pressure is placed on those employees 'left behind'. A Phlebotomy manager ( $\alpha$ ) provided an example:

"I could have two people out on annual leave and the - I might have - if I've somebody out sick we're under pressure, if I've a second person out sick we're under severe pressure and we don't cancel our service... It has to be done... I suppose they feel - they look at the people that are doing more and they're doing the work of three people saying "What thanks am I getting for it?"".

While many participants stressed that the 'work still gets done' where the impact of absenteeism or withdrawal expressions is absorbed by other employees rather than the workplace itself, the data suggests that impact borne by colleagues triggers a chain reaction and serves to proliferate workplace IR conflict. Thus, in the case IR conflict contagion, the link between individual action and replication is the intermediate impact on colleagues. The data indicates that this mechanism is mediated by management response. As noted, many managerial participants responded to absenteeism by restricting annual leave. There are two issues with this approach. First, annual leave can be used as an expression or coping mechanism for workplace IR conflict. Therefore, by restricting annual leave, management can trigger 'method displacement' (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Second, restricting annual leave can be a source of conflict in and of itself where participants described a sense of unfairness where they were punished for the absence of other employees.

This issue of equity or fairness was described in relation to IR conflict contagion. Participants described a sense of inequity where they 'picked up the slack' for colleagues withdrawing effort or pursuing absenteeism. The equitable division of work was a notable source of discontent. Managerial participants often connected interpersonal conflict with this issue, explaining that employees 'watched each other's performance' but that this conflict was beyond the remit of the employment relationship. In this regard, conflict also related to management (vertical, IR conflict) for (i) not recognising the problem; (ii) failing to address the problem (see Gall & Hebdon 2008:590, 'power of remedy'); and (iii) failing to consider the impact on remaining employees.



"I found then, when you have somebody that is bad at coming into work, it rubs off on someone else. They're kind of... 'well, if they're getting away with it'... you know... " (Administrative Manager,  $\theta$ ).

"... we had a complaint about two weeks ago that some people felt the workload was unfairly distributed. How can I manage that? I can't. Unless you want me to come at three o'clock in the morning and go around all the hospital and check all the request forms, how can I manage it? How can I do it, like? I can't" (Phlebotomy Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

Thus, in line with research on the contagious properties of strike, the findings indicate that IR conflict is more broadly contagious both within and beyond the workplace and the employment relationship. Specifically, the data suggests that the impact of individual IR conflict expressions on colleagues and equity concerns transmit IR conflict and its expression across the collective.

### **Venting and the Creation of 'Shared Reactance'**

The data indicated that little collusion occurred between employees regarding the *expression* of IR conflict on two fronts: (i) the decision to express, and (ii) the decision of how to express. However, the most collective, or semi-collective, expression of workplace IR conflict evident in the data was venting. In this regard, while collusion surrounding the *expression* of IR conflict was not common, there was significant collusion surrounding the *recognition* of IR conflict. The data indicates that venting, an expression of IR conflict, also acts as a transmission mechanism for the replication of IR conflict expressions. Consistent with Bartunek *et al.* (2008) on the creation of shared meaning, venting allows employees to 'get on the same page' regarding discontent in the workplace.

"... well the only thing to do is kind of forget about it and try and brush it off and it's like everything else it's a phase... it was just one person that was annoyed or angry at the time and they were blowing off steam and it's kind of easier to try and forget about it than get too wound up" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"Like, it would be casual now, like, we wouldn't, like, hold a meeting or anything like that, like, we would just - if something arose that somebody was bothered about they might say "Do you feel the same about it?"... we would joke over... "Because I'm not paid for this!" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

While some used venting as a coping mechanism or mode of social proof, this seemingly benign process seemed to trigger recognition amongst colleagues regarding the substance of IR conflict. Following the creation of 'shared meaning' (Bartunek *et al.*, 2008), some employees pursued individualised action.

In addition, some participants explained that venting was used, consciously or unconsciously, to promote discontent and action in other employees. The data indicated that employees were

aware of differences in preferences. While some favoured venting and inaction, others found 'empty threats' a source of frustration. These action-orientated employees explained that they felt apathetic colleagues used venting to encourage them, implicitly, to act. Such views are evident in the following quotes:

"... people just aren't bothered... a lot of the time they'll give out hell or they'd be rising. They know there's a few people who they know they'll go giving out, and go and rise them - and then they'll do the action" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

"There probably is levels of venting now. To be honest, there was a colleague of mine in a similar position in another lab who was saying we should be on strike... and kept telling myself we should be on strike. And that was probably the worst pressure I had. I really had to talk to [colleague] and say just ... 'I'm getting on fine'... and I would know when they had met [colleague]. [Colleague] wasn't going on strike, but... was [encouraging me to]" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Thus, venting acts as a transmission mechanism by triggering reactance (Jaffee, 2007) on a group level through the creation of shared meaning (Bartunek *et al.*, 2008). In this regard venting replicates IR conflict, and its individualised expression, through what is termed here '*shared reactance*'. While venting was a collective or semi-collective expression, actions following '*shared reactance*' were decided upon and pursued on a largely individual basis.

### **Culture**

In contrast to the strike expression which hinges on the unity of the collective, IR conflict evidenced in the case data did not coalesce around a particular expression. However, participants explained that in some instances culture triggered coalescence around one expression in a workplace. In this regard shared norms in the workplace (Schein, 1984) replicated expressions of IR conflict at the group, or workplace level. When the expression of workplace IR conflict is individualised and varied, expression is dispersed across the menu of options. However, a cohesive workplace or professional culture can act as an intervening variable encouraging coalescence around a particular expression or group of expressions. The role of culture in this regard was identified by a HR/IR ( $\theta$ ) Manager:

"there are areas that will always, for some reason or another... their staff would reach seven days self-certified in a year... there's a culture there".

In case 1<sup>59</sup>, both the Phlebotomy Manager and Laboratory Manager identified the Phlebotomy department as problematic where voluntary absenteeism was a common expression of IR conflict. Both participants used the term 'culture' to explain this consistency of expression.

"It's an absenteeism problem, yeah... but the whole culture according to my phlebotomy manager has changed sick leave is not a problem anymore..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

In line with culture and its role in creating homogeneity, re-enacting learned behaviours may also create replication of particular expressions. In this regard participants described observing peers - particularly those with seniority or length of service - for cues regarding behaviour. Peer pressure, or the perception of peer pressure, was also described. These dynamics are evident in the quotes below.

"Well, I suppose you'd have to see what everyone else was doing as well, like" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\gamma$ ).

"... the Chief that would be generally bringing in changes that might be objected against and it would be a member of staff who'd been there for quite a while that would generally resist them, and then others as well that would kind of just - because they were resisting, I think, the others felt like they should resist too or they'd join in..." (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

Despite references to culture and a desire to 'fit' with 'everyone else[s]' response to workplace IR conflict, participants described a lack of solidarity in the Medlab group as a rationale against strike action. In this regard, sub-cultures may trigger consistency of expression rather than an overarching workplace, or occupational culture. This is consistent with the prevalence of sub-cultures in the healthcare setting (Davies *et al.*, 2000).

Thus, culture was identified by participants as a mechanism by which IR conflict expressions are replicated across the collective where the homogenising properties of culture encourage coalescence around a set of IR conflict expressions.

Gall and Hebdon (2008), and others (Mullholland, 2004; Junor *et al.*, 2009) explain that while expressions can be individual, there may be underlying semi-collective elements such as tacit agreements between employees. As noted, while the findings indicate the individual and non-union expression of IR conflict, there is evidence within and across cases that employees use the same types of expressions. The data suggests that IR conflict and the types of expressions are replicated across the collective through a number of transmission mechanisms, including escalation and de-escalation following non-resolution; contagion or knock-on effects; venting and

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<sup>59</sup> Cognisant of organisational and workplace boundaries of culture, examples are provided on a case-by-case basis. However the theme of culture as a transmission mechanism was described in all four sites.

the creation of shared reactance; and culture. Individual expression of IR conflict, when replicated can impact on the workplace. This is explored in the following section which addresses the second research question.

#### **7.4 THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFLICT**

Strikes, incurring the massive cost of a halt in production, have a significant and readily identifiable impact on the organisation. The view that the strike is the most costly expression for organisations has informed the focus of research on the strike expression (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Non-strike expressions of workplace IR conflict are, as outlined, much more covert. Therefore, their impact is difficult to identify and assess. At this juncture it is important to note that impact is not inferred from the extent of any particular expression presented in Chapter 6. The purpose of the study is not to quantify. Rather the study explores *how* IR conflict impacts on the workplace. Therefore, consistent with the phenomenological approach, impact is inferred from the participant experience where *participants* themselves connect IR conflict and impact on the workplace.

In service of the research objective to more broadly explore the nature of IR conflict, this study is informed by Pondy (1967) who noted the use of productivity, adaptability and stability as lenses through which the impact of organisational conflict can be considered. These lenses are now explored in relation to the impact of IR conflict on the workplace.

#### **PRODUCTIVITY**

While the psychological (Barling & Milligan, 1987; Nicholson & Kelly, 1980) and relational (Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2008) impacts of strikes have received some attention, research focuses on the impact of strike-based IR conflict in terms of working days lost (Turkington, 1975). Thus, in terms of Pondy's framework, existing research on the impact of IR conflict is most closely associated with productivity.

Participants stressed that expressions of IR conflict did not impact on the work, explaining that 'the work still gets done'. This view of IR conflict and its impact on productivity may be rooted in employee efforts to guard against cognitive dissonance where employees expressing workplace IR conflict seek to avoid the belief that their actions impact on service delivery and patients. In contrast, some participants acknowledged the impact of IR conflict on their own performance; their ability to communicate; and willingness to cooperate. These competing views are illustrated in the following excerpts:

"No, like, as I say I don't know is it because it's patient care... or something, like, the work never, like, gets to suffer over it, you know that kind of a way?" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

"You're kind of slow, you're not at your best, but still, we all pitch in together" (Medical Lab Aide,  $\theta$ ).

"It [IR conflict] does affect your motivation because you do feel like you're being treated like a machine... So you do feel very under-appreciated... I suppose, to a degree, it affects your performance as well, it affects your ability to communicate with the rest of your staff because you just don't care anymore" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

When participants acknowledged the impact of IR conflict expressions on productivity, they often described withdrawal of effort and/or absenteeism. Managerial participants explained that IR conflict and workplace stress impact on individual performance. A Laboratory Manager ( $\beta$ ) explained that when employees are "unhappy... their performance [suffers]" while other participants explained that, in response to workplace IR conflict, they withdraw effort. These viewpoints are illustrated below.

"I think some people can't cope with the busyness sometimes and then their productivity goes down... Some people get into stress and their productivity is not good because they're going around in circles" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"... you know, you say 'oh, take it easy' or 'I'll go-slow'... there'd be a few - especially longer term employees that... they'd do half the amount of work that they normally do..." (Medical Lab Aide,  $\alpha$ ).

"Well I suppose one of the ways where people can express it is slip down a gear, you know, I suppose if people feel that they're doing so much and it's not being recognised you have some people what will come in and say 'Well that's it, I'm just doing this today and this is all that I can do'" (Phlebotomy,  $\beta$ ).

Interestingly, impact in this regard was often discussed in terms of immediate colleagues, rather than the workplace or the organisation. However, in reference to the contagion mechanism identified in Section 7.3, expressions of IR conflict can proliferate.

"[Some employees]... would let [you] down, you know, an already strained workforce, you know, leave down their colleagues" (Clerical Manager,  $\beta$ ).

"I suppose there's one we're kind of - that's in the process at the moment that as consumed a lot of people and it's underperformance by one Phlebotomist that's affecting the whole group..." (Phlebotomy Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

Participants also provided examples where withdrawal of commitment reduced productivity. In some instances this related to the extended working day and completion of work at the end of a shift. In other instances, discretionary behaviours previously provided to contribute to

productivity were withdrawn. The following quotes provide illustrations of this:

"We have lost something by working eight to eight. There's things happening now, work being left over that would never have happened, and it's left over till the next morning... everyone would stay till quarter past five and clear it..." (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"...that cohort that goes into the coffee room at... 20 past eight... they'll never come out at five to nine... you could push a button here Jennifer and the instrument might take 20 minutes to go into a cycle, right. So if you did it at 20 to nine that would only entail [pressing the button] but when you come out at nine o'clock that's your 20 minutes that you've saved so if you come out at nine o'clock it's 20 past nine [before work can proceed]" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

The impact of IR conflict evident in the case was most related to the flight response, and expressions such as absenteeism and withdrawal of effort or commitment. Interestingly, the strike was not described in reference to an impact on productivity. The impact of flight expressions on productivity is consistent with the quid-pro-quo underpinning this response where the employee seeks to invest less to re-balance the effort bargain. While not as visible or dramatic as the impact of strike action on productivity, the data suggests that non-strike expressions erode day-to-day workplace productivity.

#### ADAPTABILITY

The impact of workplace IR conflict on workplace adaptability was discussed in strong terms by participants where IR conflict was considered a key impediment to change implementation in this setting. This is consistent with the identification of resistance as an expression of IR conflict in Chapter 6. However, there was some evidence to support the idea that IR conflict can have a positive impact on workplace adaptability. In this regard fix responses, where employees used soft voice to resolve workplace IR conflict, had some success in *promoting* change in the workplace.

Similar to the flight response, many participants described existing workplace changes in the context of a 'quid-pro-quo' whereby the change was 'bought'. A Laboratory Manager ( $\alpha$ ) noted this dynamic:

"... but there has to be a quid-pro-quo and... I wouldn't have that experience in the private sector where I worked..."

The data suggests that workplace IR conflict impacts on workplace adaptability by delaying the implementation of workplace change. In some instances delay to implementation hinged on the substance of the change, while in others resistance - and subsequent delay - arose due to IR conflict over the managerial approach to change implementation. As noted, however, the motives

of resistance as an expression of IR conflict were varied, concealed, and often difficult to disentangle from espoused rationales for employee behaviour. The quotes provided illustrate the impact of IR conflict on the pace of workplace change.

"... for example, we had in our portering department, we had a change in practice in relation to collecting used needles which was safer and more efficient and a certain number of employees kind of objected to it because we didn't consult with them... it transpired they had no issue with doing it, they had an issue about how they were - their perception was they were told to do it rather than consulted about doing it. And that took a number of weeks to resolve" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"... the extended day we had to crawl back maybe a month on that because people weren't just still happy even though I thought we were ready to go. They said... 'Hold your horses here, we're not fully'..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Managerial participants noted the need to explain and justify all changes, and that this process in and of itself slowed change due to the numbers involved and the variety of different groups invested. This need for 'buy-in', and the process by which it was secured was identified as a key source of delay, and impact of IR conflict. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

"... if they [management] need something to be done, they don't need a song and dance from employees about what is the rationale behind it... it's a waste of everybody's time explaining why we're doing it..." (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

"... we had to do an evolutionary rather than revolutionary advance but... when they listened to the lecturers, international lecturers talking about what's happening in other countries they came on board then. But they're still in their heads [they] want to stay separate. So I haven't won that piece yet" (Laboratory Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

"... the situation will be put to the lab, "This will be of huge benefit to the patient", you know, there's a clinical justification for it, you know, you'll do a financial justification, you know, value for money and..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\beta$ ).

Participants explained that even small managerial decisions were subjected to high scrutiny where the rationale underpinning change needed to be presented in detail to all stakeholders. A Clerical Manager ( $\beta$ ) described a process whereby an additional clipboard was added to an administration process:

"Each time. "There's no need for it", this [is] the reaction, "There's no need for that. Why are you doing that?", whatever, you know. But I mean you just explain it's wasting time..."

Managerial participants across the data, and in many of the above excerpts, explained that IR conflict, and resistance as an expression, caused delays to change implementation and 'wasted time'. However, in some instances the impact of workplace IR conflict on adaptability escalated

from delayed implementation of change to non-implementation of change. This is illustrated in the excerpts below.

"... there's something that a manager in one of the areas wants to bring in and staff are resisting it quite strongly. They've been to the unions. It doesn't seem to be progressing at all because there is quite a large resistance to it, strong resistance to it" (HR/IR,  $\theta$ ).

"Refusal to implement something new or something like that, I think" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"... hold on, just give it a chance first, give it a chance... and I know they're not one bit happy so then as I see that going on, I go into [Lab Manager] and say... "[Lab Manager], this is a non-runner" (Administrative Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Participants in  $\alpha$  case described the non-implementation of an ICT system where, following several years of non-implementation, an improved system was successfully installed. Accounts from different participants on this example are presented below:

"they tried to bring it in [several] years ago and we - we came up with an awful lot of problems, we'd be in at seven o'clock in the morning or half seven in the mornings and the system... we just told them 'Sorry, we're not partaking in it. There is no backup, there's no IT'... [we] just stopped it there and then..." (Phlebotomy Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

"That was, God, that as about [several] years ago I'd say when we actually done that. I think they did it for two months but... then all of a sudden it just stopped..." (Medical Lab Aide,  $\alpha$ ).

A view emerged amongst participants, employees and management alike, that locally-driven change was not successful. Rather, change implementation "would never [get] done unless it was forced..." from the national level (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ). In some instances, line management utilised the distance between them and nationally-driven change while employee participants explained that resentment would be directed at the source of the change agenda. These views are illustrated with multiple viewpoints from  $\gamma$  case:

"For any change locally [if] your staff are against it like, that's it like, it ain't going to happen, you know. You can't impose a change, other than maybe a national change" (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"To be honest, the hospital, the HSE, I push it that way [*laughs*]... it's nothing to do with me. I'm just the messenger" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"In terms of changing things, so in the public system, if a change is implemented, it's generally from someone outside the hospital. [If]... it's either HR or management or the lab manager is implementing something to save money or be more efficient in something, which might not suit everyone in the lab... you'd have resentment towards whoever's [driving] it" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).



Describing the impact of resistance to change, as an expression of IR conflict, on workplace adaptability, participants often attributed non-implementation to management and its failure to enforce implementation. A Medical Lab Aide ( $\alpha$ ), describing an instance where employees reversed a change to work practices, explained that non-implementation occurred "... because it was let. It was allowed go back to the way it was. No one said a thing". In this regard managerial ability may be undermined.

IR conflict and its impact on adaptability was also identified with regard to the substance of the managerial change agenda. Participants explained that the spirit of the change initiatives were undermined where, in order for change to proceed, management had to compromise. Some managerial participants were concerned that, in all of the negotiating with multiple stakeholders necessary to progress change, the change agenda is diluted.

"I'm trying to think really from the lab point of view - no, most of it is kind of where you discuss it [workplace change] and like if people's opinions are given, sometimes you would say... 'Well, maybe we'll do it that way then'... you know that kind of way, so you do kind of compromise" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

"But it's - my view would be that concept or that model is being diluted as things progress" (HR/IR,  $\gamma$ ).

Participants recounted extensive efforts to implement the extended working day smoothly. In order to minimise workplace IR conflict, subordinates were allowed to adapt the roster to suit their personal circumstances and preferences. However, some managers felt that they should not be 'tweaking' strategic initiatives, explaining that such a practice will result in the non-implementation of LRMS. These views are illustrated in the following excerpts:

"So I took a sort of - I had to present the bad news to them all the time... I was saying... 'I'm being as flexible as possible here. Do you want to work from eight in the morning to eight at night three days a week, we'll try and accommodate it... So I kept giving them options... I'll be honest and say sometimes people who were outside the lab would... say that we're mad, we're mad for bending over backwards'" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"... it [LMRS] will never be implemented and that's the notion of change in this country, public service change, you know, we pay lip service or we pay consultants a huge amount of money to - to come up with a strategy, we tweak the strategy. Ten years later we're still tweaking the strategy to suit our local environment which is fine but then implementation is just left - and we've all plenty of experience of that" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

The impact of workplace IR conflict on workplace adaptability is significant. Taken together there is evidence of delayed change; non-implementation of change; and compromised change arising from workplace IR conflict. The emphasis on nationally-driven change, non-implementation and

compromised change is reminiscent of Abbott (2007:63) where "securing industrial peace becomes a more important goal than achieving business objectives". Related to the ability to adapt is the ability to maintain course and survive. In this regard, attention now turns to the impact of IR conflict on stability.

## STABILITY

As noted in Chapter 2 stability, identified by Pondy (1992) as the degree to which relationships are 'stable and cooperative', is considered here as the ability to pursue the organisational mission; to survive; and the extent to which parties behave in a predictable manner. In a healthcare setting workplace stability is closely related to the ability to deliver quality patient care. Thus, participants described the impact of workplace IR conflict on service delivery, errors, and the patient.

The impact of IR conflict expressions was described by HR/IR managers in terms of service delivery. Often these concerns were linked to expressions such as absenteeism, withdrawal of commitment, and silence. It was also explained that while managers should be focusing on the threats to service delivery posed by the economic environment, managing IR and IR conflict were prominent activities. This provides support for McDermott and Keating (2011). These views are illustrated in the following quotes:

"the service won't be provided or won't be provided in the way it should be provided" (HR/IR,  $\alpha$ ).

"I think in this present environment - I think every day managers have a lot more to be getting on with in terms of actually surviving and providing services" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

Absenteeism, as an expression of workplace IR conflict, was identified as having a critical impact on stability and the ability to provide services. In the healthcare setting, absenteeism has a particularly significant impact on service delivery due to the labour intensive and frontline nature of services. In this regard "bums on seats" was considered the most pressing concern of management (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ). Therefore, the unpredictability of absenteeism, linking directly to Pondy's (1967, 1992) conceptualisation of stability as the degree to which relationships are stable and cooperative, was considered a threat to the "viability of the rota" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ). This is illustrated in the following quotes:

"... I never know who's going to be out sick. There's always at least one or two people out sick at all times throughout the whole year'..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"So we have to make sure that we have the bulk of our people always there. [Sick leave] causes havoc for time off, for organising annual leave... sick leave, well, you just work on a wing and a prayer, you know, we don't have huge records of sick leave here so I'm very lucky that way. But definitely... you always have to be thinking, you know the way, who's

off after on-call, you know, have I enough people there for the core hours?" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

Other expressions linked by participants to an impact on stability, and specifically service delivery, included withdrawal of commitment and cooperation, and silence. A Laboratory Manager ( $\beta$ ) explained that there was no cooperation regarding annual leave where employees would not "take it at a time that suits the laboratory and won't impact on the service". A HR/IR manager ( $\gamma$ ), describing withdrawal of cooperation as "subtle" and "crippling", explained that withdrawal of cooperation and the absence of flexibility was a real threat to both the organisation and employment relationship. Interestingly, a similar view was articulated by a union representative ( $\beta$ ). Excerpts are provided below:

"Where's it [workplace IR conflict] gone?... It's very subtle, Well, it hasn't [gone]... strikes, while they've gone... employees rather than go on strike... they will do the bare minimum associated with their role. In my view, that's the most crippling piece that you can have in the employment relationship... conflict, where is it now... [it] manifests itself, I think the goodwill and the lack of goodwill... people will just do their nine to five... you won't get flexibility to cover any kind of needs that might arise outside of that" (IR/HR Manager,  $\gamma$ ).

"[Withdrawal of commitment] has consequences for the laboratory... because you need everyone pushing together in the same direction if you want to achieve whatever it is you need to... you have lost a whole... generation of Medical Scientists that just don't give two hoots about... the job anymore. I would find it very - I wouldn't think that people will go on strike I just think people will feel there's nothing to be achieved by it. People just, I suppose, they do what they have to do and that's it... they're not going to be engaging in [anything] good for the laboratory unless there's something in it for them themselves" (Union Representative,  $\beta$ ).

In some cases, participants explained that the withdrawal of cooperation - and specifically the use of skills and discretion - paralysed the laboratory and service delivery where dissatisfied employees suddenly 'play dumb'. A Basic Grade Medical Scientist ( $\beta$ ) commented on the impact of this expression for service delivery in the laboratory in the context of unrecognised posts and the non-availability of career progression:

"People, even though they're well able, well capable... people just won't make the decision because the buck stops with somebody who's getting paid to make that decision and decisions won't get made".

The data suggests that IR conflict impacts on the pursuit of organisational mission. In this healthcare context, patient care is central to mission. While many participants stress that IR conflict does not impact on the work or the patient, some described the impact on the patient in strong terms whilst becoming outwardly upset or angry. Neglect and withdrawal of commitment and cooperation were specifically identified in this regard. Organisational errors or a delay in

patient treatment was discussed by participants in an emotional manner, while withdrawal cooperation for accreditation - linked to quality of patient care - was also considered as an impact of IR conflict on workplace stability and patient care. Examples are provided below.

"... where I would see it's essential to get a result out today maybe, or it would improve the patient's possible outcome doing it today, they'll say, 'Ah, it'll be all right tomorrow'. The patient's going nowhere, they're going to be - whereas I could see... 'Well, maybe an intervention might be made faster" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"... that's what bugs me, it's that - because these things will lead to errors. Errors can be serious or minor but if they're very serious they can lead to death or delayed diagnosis or something like that. So when I find out that if they had followed their own procedures of checks it would have been detected prior to the results going out or prior to maybe no result going out... that's when I would be angry..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

"... refusing to take on extra roles like - for instance, we're accredited here and we have had staff who have said... 'I'm not doing that'... accreditation is part and parcel of your role anyway, no matter what grade you are..." (Senior Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

Reflective of Fried (1993), participants linked IR conflict to stress and consequent errors. A Senior Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ) elaborates on this dynamic, and how it can impact on the stability of the workplace:

"[People] don't work well when they're not - people don't work well they're stressed. When people are relaxed in work they can learn easier, they can work easier. If people are stressed they don't tend to do things well. You may think you're getting through more because you're hyper vigilant but in fact you're doing things quite badly, you're likely to make errors because you're not focusing on what you're - what's in hand, it takes longer to do things... if they feel tense they may be spending longer on something that would be necessary."

In addition to impact on service delivery and patient care, participants suggested that workplace IR conflict undermines management's ability to manage. In this regard, workplace IR conflict threatens the viability of the organisation which is contingent on maintenance of the managerial hierarchy<sup>60</sup>. Providing further support for Abbot (2007) and Teague and Roche (2012) some managerial participants described a reluctance to manage IR conflict and a fear of discipline in general. Often, this view was underpinned by personal preferences and previous experiences where discipline resulted in grievance procedures and bullying claims. An example is provided below:

"Yes. Now I have to say, I don't have that problem, but I would - I could see it, you know.

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<sup>60</sup> This view is consistent with the pluralist perspective adopted for this research which, unlike the Marxist perspective, seeks to maintain a collaborative employment structure where employees/unions have a legitimate role in *management* decision-making. Further, it is consistent with HRM and unitarism which, also used in this project, emphasises managements 'right to manage'. See Chapter 2.

From my past experiences and around the place, I can see people can push people like me into very awkward situations. If that isn't an issue and they're coming in to work every day and their mind is half with it, I have - very little I can do and even approaching them, I feel vulnerable because [of previous claims]... I suppose... for *peace* sake [speaker's emphasis], I sort of let things drift" (Chief Medical Scientist, γ).

Thus, the findings demonstrate that far beyond productivity, IR conflict impacts on the stability of the workplace - its ability to provide a service, pursue mission, and survive (see Table 7.3). In this regard, the aftermath (Pondy, 1967) of previous IR conflicts erodes the managerial position creating managerial paralysis. This is reminiscent of the view that nationally-driven change is more successful than locally-driven initiatives, and points to disempowerment of workplace management as an area in which IR conflict undermines workplace stability.

Table 7.3: The Impact of Workplace IR Conflict

Units of Meaning	Interpretation / Analysis		Expressions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "We're short staffed. If you don't turn up somebody else has to do your job"</li> <li>• "you know, you say 'oh, take it easy' or 'I'll go-slow'"</li> <li>• "they're maybe not performing to the level that they should... If they're unhappy"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Workload Overflow</li> <li>→ Reduced performance</li> <li>→ Contagion Effects</li> </ul>	Productivity	Absenteeism Tardiness Withdrawal of Effort
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "they were told to do it rather than consulted about doing it. And that took a number of weeks to resolve"</li> <li>• "the extended day we had to crawl back maybe a month on that because people weren't just still happy"</li> <li>• "But it's - my view would be that concept or that model is being diluted as things progress"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Delayed Change</li> <li>→ Non-Implementation</li> <li>→ Compromised Change</li> </ul>	Adaptability	Resistance Withdrawal of Cooperation Soft Voice Voicing Discontent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "if I've somebody out sick we're under pressure, if I've a second person out sick we're under severe pressure"</li> <li>• "You know, and people are under pressure, they're doing too much and prone to errors"</li> <li>• "their mind is half with it, I have - very little I can do and even approaching them, I [manager] feel vulnerable"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Service Delivery</li> <li>→ Errors &amp; Patient Care</li> <li>→ Managerial Ability</li> </ul>	Stability	Absenteeism Annual Leave Neglect Silence Venting Withdrawal of Cooperation, Commitment

In drawing Section 7.4 on the impact of IR conflict on the workplace to a close, the data demonstrates (see Table 7.3) that while research focuses on the impact of strikes on productivity, the effect of IR conflict is as varied as its expression. Thus, the focus of research on the strike expression - as the most quantifiably costly - is myopic. While participants identified ways in which IR conflict expressions undermine productivity, they placed a much greater emphasis and exhibited much greater concern regarding the impact of IR conflict on workplace adaptability and stability. The findings suggest that IR conflict is a key impediment to change in this context. Perhaps most striking, however, are findings on the impact of IR conflict on stability. In deconstructing and reconstructing pieces of raw data on the expression and impact of IR conflict, it is easy to forget that at the centre of these cases are patients. Therefore at this juncture, the research findings are considered in context where the influence of healthcare features on the nature, expression and impact of IR conflict are explored.

### **7.5 THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT: DOES CONTEXT MATTER?**

The study is situated in a healthcare setting. This rationale was explicated in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 where the features of the setting that signal the propensity for IR conflict were described. In line with Lincoln and Guba (1985) on transferability, and Whetton (1989) on need to identify boundaries, the purpose of this section is to situate the findings within the selected healthcare setting. In doing so, the aim is to sensitise theory development to this healthcare setting which is "especially important for theories based on experience" (Whetton, 1989:492). Participants described the influence of three features in this context on the nature, expression, and impact of workplace IR conflict: profession; patients; and media.

#### **PROFESSION**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the healthcare context consists of a number of occupations and professional groups. The data indicated that this key characteristic of the setting influenced the nature, expression, and impact of workplace IR conflict.

Many participants held the view that 'good professionals' do not engage in IR conflict. It was explained that these employees, unlike their non-professional and lower grade counterparts either do not experience or do not express dissatisfaction in the employment relationship. This view is largely rooted in unitarist assumptions regarding the illegitimacy and deviance of IR conflict. Participants explained that IR conflict is only problematic with lower grade non-professionals. Specifically, strike action was considered "very unprofessional" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ). These accounts are illustrated in the following excerpts:

"We had a - since I started 40 years ago we've never had a strike. You can imagine that's a fair record, so they don't go on strike very easily, they're very good professionals, they try to resolve their issues locally" (Laboratory Manager,  $\beta$ ).

"... the only conflicts that arise are not between the people who are highly motivated, they will find a way out of specific problems. The conflict area really is down at the lower end where people are not motivated or not interested in their work..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\alpha$ ).

This perception was also evident in the data with reference to the use of absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict. Absenteeism was described by participants along occupational and grade lines. In particular, management explained that only "certain grades of staff" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ) use voluntary absenteeism, while clinicians and professionals do not 'go sick'. A Laboratory Manager ( $\beta$ ) explained:

"... absenteeism - which is not a huge problem in the laboratory to be fair, certainly not with the medical staff or the scientific staff. It becomes more of a problem as, you know, you go down the tiers of - of status".

In contrast, participants holding senior professional roles identified voluntary absenteeism as an expression of workplace IR conflict. A Senior Medical Scientist ( $\alpha$ ) outlined their own use of voluntary absenteeism:

"Well, if I don't feel up to coming into work I'll certainly take a day off sick... I'm - I don't feel particularly that it's - there's a quid-pro-quo in here so I suppose if I wake up and I feel I have a sore throat I'll think 'well, I think I'll stay in bed today'. That's - whereas if it was a slightly different atmosphere in the health service I think I might just [make] that little bit more of an effort..."

In some instances, participants explained that variation in absenteeism rates may be rooted in degrees of patient contact. In reviewing documentary evidence of absenteeism for the sector and the cases, there is significant variation according to groups. However, patient contact does not seem to explain these divergences<sup>61</sup>, suggesting that other forces are at play. Participants themselves dismissed patient contact as an explanation for absenteeism when employees 'went sick' following an authorised absence. Thus, while certain expressions may be more prevalent amongst certain groups and grades - due to preferences or transmission mechanisms - professionals cannot be discounted from the expression of IR conflict.

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<sup>61</sup> The nursing group exhibits an absenteeism rate of up to 16.08% compared to a rate of 0-1% for the medical/dental group (Health Service Executive, 2012)

## Professionals and Resistance

Participants explained that professional preferences play a role in the expression of workplace IR conflict. Specifically, according to participants, higher grade professional employees were more likely to opt for voicing discontent over flight expressions such as absenteeism<sup>62</sup>. There was recognition throughout the data that professionals frequently express IR conflict through resistance. A Senior Grade Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) describes the professional use of resistance:

"[in job descriptions] there's usually 'and anything else your manager may ask you to do,'... but, if people feel that they're being asked to do jobs that would normally be paid at a higher rate... whereas now, most people, because everyone has a Masters, they'll tell you, 'I'm not doing that'... you know, so that kind of thing... "

Interestingly, this participant identifies a change in the profile of IR conflict expression where resisting more - formerly a response of lower grade non-professionals - was now firmly within the arsenal of highly educated professionals. Despite this view, many participants explained that occupational groups behave in different ways: while some groups sought out professional status, others resisted more responsibility. An illustrative quotation is provided below.

"... they're not being moved around the - it's a large lab with about 16 different specialisms, so one group, the scientists, have the gripe that they're not being moved fast enough, they're not being trained fast enough through all of the different specialisms. The MLAs [Medical Lab Aides] or the support staff [complain] around 'this isn't my job. My job description is this, so this isn't part of my job'..." (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

Owing to the healthcare context, participants described instances where the clinical or professional prerogative clashed with that of management. It was explained that clinician power poses real difficulty in advancing change, and that this is further complicated by the multiplicity of clinical specialties - each with different views and priorities. Demonstrative of the difficulty associated with managing professionals and the implications of this skewed power dynamic, the use of clinical expertise as a way to 'hold ground' was evidenced in the data. A Phlebotomy Manager ( $\gamma$ ) provides an example:

"Well, you see, the thing about change is, especially in our department, some people are afraid of change as you probably know and it frightens them... we were trying to introduce... a safety device and people had been using other needles for years and years and years and they were fine with that and, you know... "Why bother changing this? We're grand the way we are. 'We don't need a new one'... I'm not using them... You can [*pause*] as a phlebotomist, you have a kind of a choice as to which needle you prefer".

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<sup>62</sup> Despite this view there was also evidence that professionals and non-professionals alike used voluntary absenteeism as an expression of IR conflict.



Herein lies a key difficulty with managing [powerful] professionals. It is understandable - even predictable - that people, and therefore employees, prefer to decide their own fate. However, the knowledge asymmetry between professionals and managers means that this human desire can also be justified on the grounds of the organisational mission - medicine - and ultimately the patient. Therefore when professionals express IR conflict through resistance they may be more successful.

The data indicated that professionals also resisted the loss of what makes them professionals - knowledge, ability, and, autonomy. Management and employee perspectives on professional resistance to loss as an expression of IR conflict are provided below.

"I think there's huge resentment, you know, to the change in status..." (Laboratory Manager,  $\beta$ ).

"I don't know how that'll work. You see they've been talking about it for so long - don't know, like, we will always be keeping our lab because it's such a busy hospital, there's always going to be work here. They're downgrading the profession a bit, they want - they want a lot of lab aides to be working and only a couple of us, they're just trying to make us factory workers really" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

Participants also described empire *defending*<sup>63</sup> where hospitals and consultants vied for hub lab designations: "they [all] wanted to be the top dogs" (Union,  $\theta$ ). Despite these views, a Chief Medical Scientist ( $\gamma$ ) accepted that Laboratory Medicine had to change. However, this participant subsequently explained they would resist loss of expertise by securing support from other powerful professional groups and highlighting the patient interest. This approach is illustrated in the following quote:

"I would [*pause*] try and provide evidence that I've given you very good service, our turnaround times are good, our clinician - our reporting is good... Okay, maybe they'll say they're giving a better service. I would try and get the consultants on board and say... 'Look, if this goes out of here, you don't know when you're going to have - your turnaround times will deteriorate. At the moment, if a new leukaemia comes in at five o'clock in the evening and they want work done, that might mean someone staying till two in the morning, people will do that. If that goes out to a commercial company - that's gone. I say... 'That's the cost that you're [looking at] - and are you willing to support me?' And that's where I'd really get the consultants and if it affects their patients, yes, they will definitely get involved" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

The findings indicate that the professional nature of employees in this setting influence the nature of IR conflict. Participants held the view that professionals do not 'do' IR conflict. However, this study provides evidence to the contrary. The findings indicate that professionals experience and

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<sup>63</sup> Related to the concept of empire-building, the term empire defending is used here to describe attempts to keep, maintain, and protect an existing empire.

express IR conflict in a variety of ways, including absenteeism. The evidence does suggest, however, that the professional nature of employees influences *how* they express IR conflict where professional preferences play a role in choosing between expressions. These findings indicate that professionals will often resist loss of status and change initiatives which present such a threat. However, owing to their professional power, the impact of IR conflict as expressed by professionals is also significant, and seemingly quite effective. Beyond the power of most employees, professionals have autonomy and are therefore better able to resist the managerial prerogative for many purposes - one of which is, based on these findings, the expression of IR conflict.

#### PATIENT

The role of the patient with regard to IR conflict was twofold in the data. First, the patient - or rather loyalty to the patient - acted as a moderator of employees' expression of workplace IR conflict. Despite varying degrees of patient contact and the seeming separation of Medical Laboratory Scientists from the medical vocation, the centrality of the patient in the laboratory context is clear. While some participants distanced themselves from the idea of the patient, most employees - professionals and support staff - were ever conscious of the patient:

"At the end of the day, like, there is a patient at the end of every single form and every single test" (Clerical,  $\beta$ ).

Participants explained that certain expressions of IR conflict were inappropriate in the context of the patient. While some supported strike action, others explained that striking in this sector posed moral and ethical problems where the strike would have an impact, or perceived impact, on patient care. Sabotage was similarly ruled out where professionals and support staff alike agreed that in a "life or death" situation (Clerical,  $\beta$ ), sabotage was off-limits. These views are illustrated below:

"... the department I work in is a critical service so we can't withdraw the services... so I think if people do go on strike, I think we would just have to cut them [services] back and I don't know, I just hope to God they don't go on strike. [The patient] was a big issue whenever they were talking about strikes because obviously, we're all responsible adults, we're all trained, we all know what a critical role the [lab] plays and nobody wants to put a patient's life at risk, so you could never withdraw emergency services... you'd never, ever withdraw services to an extent that it could damage a patient's health because [pause] God, it would be horrific if that did happen" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I suppose we're not - it's not kind of the nature of our work, what do you sabotage, you know? You can't, you know, every patient - I suppose the fact that every sample that we have there's a patient... the patient is at the centre of what we do" (Union,  $\beta$ ).

Loyalty to the patient arose with regard to frustration in the employment relationship. Many employees described feeling stuck between management and their imposed resource constraints, and a duty of care. In addition, some were aggrieved when the patient was used to 'guilt' them into particular practices. A Phlebotomy Manager ( $\beta$ ) described this process with reference to the withdrawal of cover for some wards following a long period of understaffing:

"... 'How could you do it to patients?'. Trying to give us a guilty complex then. But I just said 'Excuse me. Don't go down that road... You cannot make me feel guilty like that... I know they're patients but... at the end of the day if I'm not able to do it I'm not able to do it and you can't cut me down in the middle and make me into two people'".

In some sub-lab settings, resistance was considered difficult where there is "someone bleeding out in [the] ED [Emergency Department]" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ). However, participants also described professional resistance, as above, where the espoused rationale for resistance centred on patient care. This was particularly evident in the data with regard to the LMRS. Senior laboratory managers and employees alike explained that reconfiguration of services would undermine patient care. This indicates a complex tension where management - also employees - are members of the same union as their subordinates. Multiple standpoints from case 3 are provided in the following quotes:

"So we have done that and I would think our GPs in this area are very well serviced. In a lot of other places... the GPs aren't that well looked after... Possibly, ours won't be as well serviced if they take it out of here" (Laboratory Manager,  $\theta$ ).

"I'm not sure how a factory lab where people who have no base in the community or any contacts with the likes of the GPs would have any interest... You know, there's that remove. When you go into a factory, there's that remove from the actual patient on the ground... there'll be a demotivation there and a detachment from patient care" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\theta$ ).

"God forbid, because you collapsed or something like and you went to [hub hospital] and you got all those bloods down and then a week later you're transferred, why take all those bloods again when you've already got those tests done" (Union Representative,  $\theta$ ).

The primacy of the patient influenced the nature of IR conflict in two ways. First, a loyalty to the patient moderated the expression of IR conflict in this setting. Second, the primacy of the patient was used - in conjunction with professional power - to pursue resistance as an expression of IR conflict. The influence of the media, and the potential public reaction to workplace IR conflict, also served to moderate the expression of IR conflict in this setting. This is considered next.

## MEDIA

The data indicated that participants held a strong fear of the media in relation to media coverage and "public sector bashing" (Chief Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ). This context feature, noted in Chapter 5, seemed to moderate the expression of IR conflict, and was specifically identified by participants in their assessment of strike action:

"... reflected in public opinion... in terms of public sector workers... they know they can't go on strike because, you know, it'll have the antipathy of the public" (HR/IR,  $\beta$ ).

"... our group of people would not be militant people... I think it's from a lack of industrial action over the last - whatever - nearly two decades now and also I think, as I said earlier, the media is having an effect on this. I know people that - they'd be talking to their friends in the private sector... 'Aw, you're in the unions, the unions blah, blah, blah'... it's nearly the bankers/unions, so ridiculous, but... that's being peddled by the media" (Union Representative,  $\alpha$ ).

This union representative explained that the Medlab group were not militant by nature but that the media posed a further barrier to 'fighting'. The negative connotations surrounding Trade Union organisations and their role in the public service were also described by a HR/IR Manager ( $\alpha$ ) who noted that, despite media portrayal and public perception, unions had been quite amenable to the changes introduced:

"Again, to put this in context I actually think that we're quite good in terms of people having taken on an awful lot more in the last three or four years because I wouldn't like to paint a picture otherwise. Because people have been very receptive to it albeit that this is a public sector employment and... the reputation is "Bloody unions!" and this, that and the other and "nothing ever happens" but in the last few years the unions have been very, very cooperative...".

There was a fear amongst respondents in relation to media coverage of pre-cut wages and specifically pre-cut on-call payments, where it was acknowledged by participants that some employees made significant amounts of money. With regard to the LMRS, an interviewee explained that there was a fear of public reaction to previous earnings and a consequent lack of public support:

"I don't know, maybe historically it's the amount of money they used make on-call, I don't know. And if that went public there would be no sympathy!"(Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\beta$ ).

This view contributed to the reluctance to strike following the threat of non-payment of the loss of earnings compensation. Generally, there was a view that the compensation payment should be kept out of the media - despite the public availability of records, and the formulaic 1.5 times

annual loss sum awarded by the Labour Court.

Interestingly, while the media portrayal of public service and healthcare employees was noted as a further disincentive to pursue industrial action - or 'fight' management in any overt manner, participants held the view that HSE management utilised public opinion to scapegoat employees and soften the ground for workplace change. This perception, in and of itself, precipitated discontent in the employment relationship which, due to its very origin, was expressed through covert and non-union expressions. These views are illustrated below.

"... the sense of having been scapegoated as public servants also. Well, in recent years, not just under the existing Government... there has been quite a lot of anti-public sector sentiment... in the media... that hasn't been an accident... I believe that the media were manipulated to... make the public sector more malleable and more amenable to taking hits" (Basic Grade Medical Scientist,  $\gamma$ ).

"I think people are very uncertain... in the - of public service-bashing that's prevalent in the media over the last couple of years people are very unsure of how they should respond because of how it might be portrayed... sort of anti-union thing... and I think that... possibly the employers are using that opportunistically" (Principal Grade Medical Scientist,  $\alpha$ ).

Arising from the negative public perception, some participants explained that they hide their employment in the HSE. This shame, or fear, surrounding healthcare employment - and the view that the employer used this against employees - may well be connected to the withdrawal of commitment where the perceived use of the media in this manner could be considered a breach of the psychological contract. A Chief Medical Scientist ( $\theta$ ) explained:

"Nobody likes to be vilified in the press, nobody... all you have to do is listen to the likes of Morning Ireland or Joe Duffy, all of these, and they are there morning, noon and night, giving out about the public service and the health service. Well, I know personally - I mean, it's hard, it's difficult. I know colleagues who will not go out in public and say that they work in the HSE..."

The media scrutiny of the public sector, and specifically the healthcare service, provides a further disincentive to pursue strike action. This provides support for Stern (1964) who explained that declining public support for strike action reduced the utility of strike. In many regards, the media attention devoted to the sector - and its largely negative orientation - acts as an additional cost for the overt or collective expression of IR conflict. Thus, the perception of the sector as conflict-prone (see Chapter 3) seems to be influencing the nature and expression of IR conflict in this setting.

Consistent with McDermott and Keating (2012) who emphasise the role of context in a healthcare setting, the findings indicate that the selected healthcare context contained a number of features

that influenced the nature of IR conflict. Specifically, the professional nature of staff; the centrality of the patient; and the media scrutiny of the setting were considered by employees when deciding how to express IR conflict. In many regards, fear of patient impact and media coverage re-enforced trends toward the passive and non-union expression of IR conflict identified in Section 7.2. The professional nature of employees played a role in how employees chose between expressions of IR conflict, and how successful they were in achieving their objectives. The findings relating to the patient serve as a reminder of the stakes in this healthcare setting. In this regard, the impact of IR conflict extends far beyond working days lost.

## **7.6 CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this chapter was to address the research objective which, identified in Chapter 1 and developed in Chapter 2, centred on more broadly exploring the nature of workplace IR conflict. In addition, this chapter sought to answer the second research question underpinning this objective: how does IR conflict impact on the workplace? To this end the Chapter, drawing analysis of IR conflict expressions provided in Chapter 6, and further analysis of aggregate interview data, presented findings on the nature and impact of IR conflict. Particular attention was given to the characteristics, dynamics and development of IR conflict - and its impact in the workplace. Finally, the Chapter considered the influence of the research setting.

The data suggests that the expression of workplace IR conflict has become, in line with speculation in existing literature (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014; Gall, 2013; Saundry & Dix, 2014) a more individualised phenomenon. In addition, a move toward passive and covert or informal expression is evident. The findings also indicate a declining role for the union in directing and co-ordinating the expression of IR conflict. These characteristics depart from the traditional view of IR conflict and re-affirm that the focus on the strike is ill-considered. Further, the shift toward the covert expression of IR conflict where employees seek to avoid detection, highlights the limitations of focusing on the most observable forms of IR conflict. In this regard, research methods used in IR conflict research must move beyond the quantitative tradition.

Providing further evidence of individualised expression, Section 7.3 presented findings on how employees choose between the array of IR conflict expressions. The findings demonstrate that employees assess the variety of expressions with reference to their relative supply, utility and cost where individual - and professional preferences - influence appraisal of these factors.

In light of findings on individual and non-union expression of IR conflict, and the consistent set of expressions used by employees within and across cases, Section 7.3 also considered how IR

conflict expressions are replicated across the workplace. Adding to our understanding of how IR conflict expression develops in the workplace, the data provides support for Hebdon and Noh (2013) who found, in their quantitative study, that expressions of IR conflict can escalate following non-resolution. In addition, the case findings demonstrate that, following non-resolution, employees can de-escalate their response and pursue more passive expressions of IR conflict. Three additional transmission mechanisms which replicate IR conflict expressions were identified as contagion effects; venting and the creation of shared reactance; and culture creating coalescence of expression. These mechanisms indicate how individual expressions can be replicated across the workplace collective to create an aggregate impact at the workplace level.

Findings on the second research question, how does IR conflict impact on the workplace, indicate that the impact of IR conflict - much like its expression - is varied. While existing research has focused on the impact of strikes in terms of working days lost, the findings demonstrate that IR conflict in its multiplicity of forms has a more systemic impact on the workplace. The findings indicate that the impact on productivity, while less dramatic and quantifiable than that of strike action, erodes day-to-day productivity in the workplace. However the findings also demonstrate the impact of IR conflict far beyond productivity. In this regard, the data supports Pondy (1967, 1992). While impact on productivity was a concern for participants, greater emphasis was placed on the impact of adaptability and stability. The ability to pursue and implement change was considered a challenge in this setting where IR conflict was connected to delayed change, non-implementation, and compromised change. Stability - as the ability to pursue mission and survive - was also key amongst the concerns of participants. Impact in this regard was particularly striking due to the healthcare setting and the centrality of the patient.

Situating the study within its context, Section 7.5 reviewed features of the setting which influenced the nature of workplace IR conflict. The patient played a moderating role in this setting, which, along with adverse media coverage, poses further disincentives to strike. The role of professionals was also notable where many managerial participants held the view that IR conflict was 'not for professionals'. However, many senior professionals described their experience and expression of IR conflict. In addition, the data indicated that different groups hold different preferences which can influence interpretations of expressions in terms of relative supply, utility, and cost. The findings suggest that professionals commonly employed resistance to loss and change as an expression of workplace IR conflict. This combined with findings on the impact of IR conflict on workplace adaptability adds to our understanding of change implementation in this healthcare setting.

In revisiting the research objective, the chapter concludes that the nature of workplace IR conflict differs from our traditional view. Instead of being collective and unionised, the findings indicate that IR conflict has become a more individualised pursuit. This provides empirical evidence supporting speculation amongst IR theorists (Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Godard, 2011, 2014; Gall, 2013; Saundry & Dix, 2014). The data demonstrates that participants had a preference for covert and passive expression of IR conflict. Related to these characteristics, the evidence indicates that IR conflict is increasingly beyond the remit of Trade Unions where employees reject their involvement, and union representatives seem unable to galvanise discontent into any form of directed action. Despite these findings, the data shows that the impact of IR conflict on the workplace is significant and varied, and as such it cannot be fully understood by quantified measures.

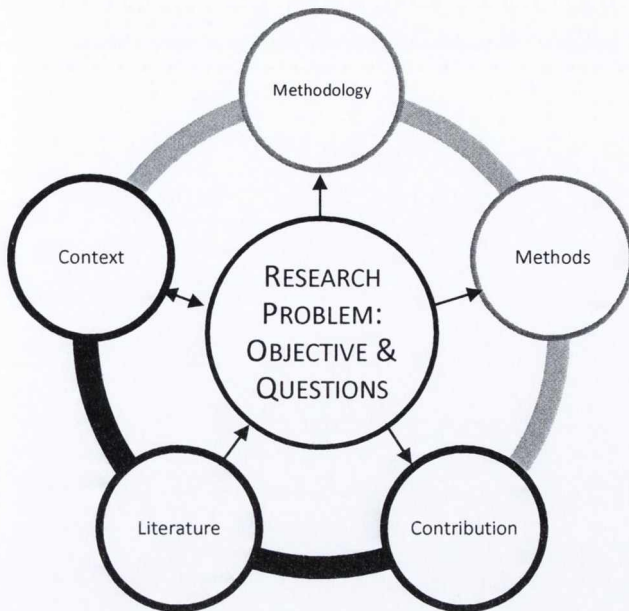
At this juncture, this research dissertation moves from findings and analysis to discussion, theory development and research conclusions. The remaining chapters enfold existing literature with the research findings of this study to develop theory. In doing so, these final chapters will delineate the research contributions and synthesise the answers to the research objective and questions posed in Chapter 1.





## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

### THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT: EXPRESSION AND IMPACT IN A HEALTHCARE SETTING



#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore the nature of workplace IR conflict more comprehensively. Underpinning this objective were two research questions: (i) how do employees express workplace IR conflict?, and (ii) how does IR conflict impact on the workplace? The inspiration for research was the dominant focus of previous inquiry on strike action. This narrow focus was unwarranted for two reasons. Firstly, strike activity has been declining since the 1970s (Dabscheck, 1991; Brecher, 2000; Healy, 2002; Kauffman, 2004; Scheuer, 2006; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Roche & Teague, 2010, Bordogna, 2010). While the scale of this decline may have been overstated (Gall, 2012), this acknowledged trend signals potential change in the nature of IR conflict. Secondly, while research has predominantly focused on the strike expression, there is recognition amongst IR scholars that IR conflict is expressed in a variety of ways. However, insufficient attention has been paid to how non-strike expressions of IR conflict are used in the workplace. Arising from this narrow focus, our knowledge – and theory – of the nature of IR conflict, how it develops, and the relationship between its expressions is underdeveloped (Margerison, 1969; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). This focus, and the shift toward deductive and quantitative research in IR (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008), has limited our understanding of a central feature in the employment relationship and its impact on the workplace.

Consequently this study sought to explore non-strike expressions of IR conflict - and their impact on the workplace. A qualitative case study methodology, underpinned by an interpretivist research philosophy, was selected due to its consistency with the research problem. While this approach contrasts with the increasingly popular hypothetico-deductive approach (ibid), it was best placed to research the 'essence' of workplace IR conflict (Berg, 2009; Godard, 2011).

Chapters 6 and 7 presented findings pertaining to the two research questions and the research objective. Consistent with the phenomenological approach, these chapters focused on the participant's lived experience of workplace IR conflict. Thus while key links to, and departures from, existing literature were noted, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the contributions to existing literature and develop theory by 'enfolding literature' (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, at this juncture, the answers to the research questions are reviewed and the realisation of the research objective is explored.

This chapter has four sections. Firstly, confirming much speculation in the literature (Scheuer, 2006; Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Godard, 2011, 2014; Saundry & Dix, 2014), the research findings provide empirical evidence of a shift toward the individualisation of IR conflict expression. Evidence is also provided suggesting that IR conflict - departing from our traditional understanding - is covert, passive and increasingly beyond the remit of the Trade Union. The study begins to address the gap identified in the literature regarding the dynamics and development of workplace IR conflict. Based on the findings, we can begin to observe how employees choose between expressions, and how IR conflict is transmitted across the workplace.

Secondly in considering the variety of IR conflict expressions, two further contributions are provided to IR literature. The Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict begins to address the limitations of Exit-Voice (Hirschman, 1970) and ELVN frameworks before expressions of workplace IR conflict are unbundled and extended beyond the current understanding contained in previous literature.

Thirdly with regard to the impact of workplace IR conflict. This study moves beyond the emphasis on the strike, and working days lost, toward a more holistic understanding of IR conflict and its impact on the workplace. Consistent with the interpretivist approach adopted, the emphasis here is not on the quantifiable assessment of IR conflict, but rather how participants identify and experience the day-to-day impact of workplace IR conflict.

The final section focuses on the influence of this healthcare setting on the nature, expression, and impact of IR conflict in the workplace. In doing so the research further illuminates the context-specific nature of workplace IR conflict. Despite the variety of IR features in the sector, the IR perspective is limited in healthcare management research. Thus, this section also identifies a secondary contribution to the healthcare management literature. To conclude the chapter will revisit the research objective and its underpinning research question in the context of identified contributions of this work.

## 8.2 THE NATURE OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT

The focus of IR conflict on the strike expression has limited our understanding of the nature of IR conflict, its dynamics and development in the workplace. Margerison (1969) asserted that focusing on the regulation of IR conflict should not overshadow exploring the nature or essence of IR conflict and how it develops in the workplace. Most recently, Hebdon & Noh (2013:44) state that "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace [IR] conflict itself" and therefore "researchers need to focus upon the dynamics between different forms of conflict expression", and how the expression of IR conflict develops in the workplace.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT

Hebdon and Noh (2013:27) conclude that the "... singular focus on strikes has caused some scholars to misinterpret the decline in strike rates as evidence of the lack of workplace conflict". Despite the decline in strike activity, this study found extensive evidence of IR conflict. However, participants described a reluctance to engage in strike, or any form of formal industrial action. Rather, they identified a wide variety of expressions by which they, and their colleagues, express workplace IR conflict. Thus, the research highlights the continued existence of IR conflict in the workplace. This confirms the view of Lansbury (2009:328), and others (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Hebdon *et al.*, 1999; Hebdon & Mazerolle, 2003; Bordogna, 2010; Roche & Teague, 2010) who argue that while "... strikes have declined in many countries, conflict still exists in the workplace in various manifestations". This view is consistent with the pluralist IR assumption that conflict in the employment relationship is inevitable. It follows that the decline of strike activity does not indicate an absence of IR conflict but rather a change in how IR conflict is expressed. Thus, the findings provide support for Drinkwater and Ingram's (2005:393) assertion that declining strike activity is an "erroneous measure of harmony at the [...] workplace". This study concludes that the focus of research on strike action is misplaced, and that IR conflict remains an enduring characteristic of the employment relationship.

In explaining the decline of strike activity, many explanations are posited in existing literature. Godard (2011, 2014) presents a useful synthesis of overlapping explanations, including the redirection of IR conflict into more individual expressions; embedded IR conflict; dormant conflict; and - somewhat reminiscent of Ross and Hartman (1960) - that capitalism has dulled the sources of conflict in the employment relationship and emphasised the sources of peace. Central to these explanations is the idea that the nature of IR conflict has changed. Many IR authors explain that IR has undergone significant changes: declining union density and coverage; an upsurge in individual employment legislation; the decline of voluntarism (Scheuer, 2006; King, 2007; Gall, 2012; Doherty, 2013). Roche *et al.* (2014) identify the changing context and its implications for the

conduct of conflict management, while Saundry and Dix (2014), with reference to the UK, noted that the pattern of workplace conflict has changed where strike action has declined while individual Employment Tribunals have increased. Consistent with these writings, this research provides qualitative empirical evidence suggesting that – while IR conflict is not gone – it has changed<sup>64</sup>. Participants themselves identified a shift in IR in the sector, and specifically a number of changes in *how* employees express IR conflict. The findings demonstrate preferences for individual, covert, passive and non-union expression of IR conflict. Further, participants – managers, employees, and union representatives alike – observed these preferences as a change in the nature of IR conflict. This outcome departs from the traditional view of IR conflict as a collective and unionised phenomenon hinging on overt strike expression. These characteristics of IR conflict are now considered in turn.

Many authors, cognisant of the decline in strike activity, have surmised that IR conflict may have been redirected into more individual expressions (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Hebdon & Stern, 1998; Hebdon, 1999; Hebdon, 2005; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Saundry & Dix, 2014; Godard, 2011, 2014). However Godard (2011) suggests that these alternative, or individual, forms are less visible than strikes and thus may be more difficult to assess. Dix *et al.* (2008) concluded, if alternative individual expressions of IR conflict have increased, the increase has not been sufficient to account for the decline in strike activity. Godard (2011) challenges this view explaining that the indicators of absenteeism and turnover in the survey data were weak, and that the analysis of this quantitative data was descriptive and lacked rigorous statistical analysis. Despite these limitations, Godard (2011:290) concludes that “[t]here... does not appear to be any research of sufficient quality to support a different conclusion”. More recently, Saundry and Dix (2014:4) identify similar patterns, concluding on the basis of the British Social Attitudes Survey, British Household Panel Survey, and Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) Series that “broad assertions of the individualization of workplace conflict are too simplistic”. These authors argue that while individual Employment Tribunals have increased, the use of grievance procedures and disciplinary action has not. In contrast, this research provides qualitative empirical evidence of individualised IR conflict. While this study, and most others<sup>65</sup>, cannot test the substitutability hypothesis on an aggregate level, the findings demonstrate that employees in this context hold a preference for individual expressions of IR conflict and the individual pursuit of these expressions.

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<sup>64</sup> As noted, change is inferred, not from longitudinal data, but rather from participant interpretations of their own behaviour, and observations.

<sup>65</sup> Gall and Hebdon (2008) explain that testing the substitution hypothesis requires an implicit assumption that the sum of conflict is fixed. Hebdon *et al.* (2005) provide a useful proxy by exploring grievance rates in the context of a strike ban. It should also be noted, however, that theory testing was not the objective of this study, nor is it a consistent objective with the study's design or philosophical stance.

Despite existing literature addressing the individualisation of IR, the focus is typically placed on management-driven individualisation where individualist HR practices shift relations away from the pluralist tradition (Gunnigle *et al.*, 1997). Focusing on IR conflict - rather than the broader construct of IR - the findings demonstrate employee individualisation of IR conflict expression where there is evidence of a bottom-up preference for individual action. This supports Roche (2001) who noted the possibility of non-HRM individualisation. However, the role of individualist HR practices and broader contextual factors, societal and economic, are not discounted. These are likely to influence the calculations employees make regarding the selection of expressions (see Section 8.3). Although employees pursue similar means to express or cope with workplace IR conflict, they do so on a largely individual basis. There is limited evidence of collusion between employees as to whether, or how, they would express IR conflict. Thus, on the basis of the research findings, I conclude that there is evidence of a trend toward individualised IR conflict where employees expressed IR conflict in-parallel rather than in-concert. The findings indicate that these individual expressions, pursued individually, may appear as semi-collective on an aggregate level when replicated by transmission mechanisms. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 8.3

Another conclusion based on the research findings is that there is a shift toward covert IR conflict. This provides support for Godard (2011:254) who suggested that IR conflict may have 'gone underground' and become embedded in behaviours not seen as expressions of IR conflict. In line with Harlos (2001), both formal and informal voice mechanisms were used by employees in this study to express workplace IR conflict. However, a preference for informal voice was identifiable. This preference for informality extended to other expressions including the withdrawal of effort or cooperation. In this regard, employees go to great lengths to conceal their expression of IR conflict, pursuing their dissatisfaction 'by stealth'. This outcome highlights the limitations of quantitative methodologies which are not well placed to access the "meaning and purpose" of covert and complex human behaviour (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106). Thus, the use of quantitative survey data to gain an 'accurate picture' of how employees express IR conflict in the workplace may be increasingly unsuitable.

The covert nature of IR conflict is further evident in the passivisation of IR conflict. Specifically, participants in this study spoke of how employees had 'lost the will to fight' describing the use of softer, often concealed, approaches to the expression of IR conflict. Participants attributed this change to the fragility of the economic context and the compliant character of the Irish nation. Consequently a view emerged that there was 'no point in fighting' management because any such attempts would not be effective in the current climate. This is consistent with Godard's (2011:294

citing Hyman, 1989) argument that strikes, and other expressions of IR conflict, have declined due to capitalism's "erosion of the will to struggle".

In addition to the individual, covert, and passive characteristics of IR conflict, the findings indicate that involvement of Trade Unions is being marginalised. This finding differs substantially from the traditional view of literature in which Trade Union involvement in IR conflict is considered so central it is often implied in other dominant characteristics of IR conflict, such as collective and organised. Recently Hebbon and Noh (2013) questioned the assumption that a union is necessary for collective action and call for research on the development of collective action in non-union firms. The findings of this study demonstrate that employees, despite the unionised nature of case organisations, favour non-union expression of IR conflict. Employees described a dissatisfaction with union organisations; a reluctance to engage with Trade Union representatives; and the rather unitarist belief that the union was intruding in 'their' employment relationship. This shift in behaviour was identified by HR/IR managers as a change in how IR conflict is expressed who interpreted this as an indication of declining union leverage. Similarly, this pattern was also identified by union representatives who described difficulty in galvanising support for any action on any issue. This suggests that the influence of unions in this setting may be beginning to wane despite the comparatively high union density and coverage. Damaged trust relations between unions and their members may be significant in this regard (Rittau & Dundon, 2010).

This preference for non-unionised IR conflict was further evidenced by the anti-strike stance of participants. The general motives underpinning this view focused again on the cost and effectiveness of strike action. In this regard the findings provide support for Godard (1992) who noted that perceived effectiveness is a determinant of strike action. The findings also resonate with Stern (1964) who argued that strikes have declined in utility because (i) dispute resolution provides a less costly alternative, and (ii) public tolerance of strike action has declined. In this study, the healthcare setting and the negative stance of the media (see Roche, 2010) combined with the economic context seem to have increased the cost of strike action - and reduced its perceived effectiveness. Providing further support for Godard (1992), participants also identified a lack of solidarity amongst employees as a rationale against strike action. This departs from accounts of the 1969 strike where the high level of solidarity, cohesiveness and social ties between Medlab employees was identified. Reminiscent of changes to work and technology that undermined the solidarity of dockers (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Edwards *et al.*, 1995), the extended working day may further erode cohesion amongst the Medlab group by reducing opportunities for socialising or 'bonding'. This further affirms the individualisation of workplace IR conflict.

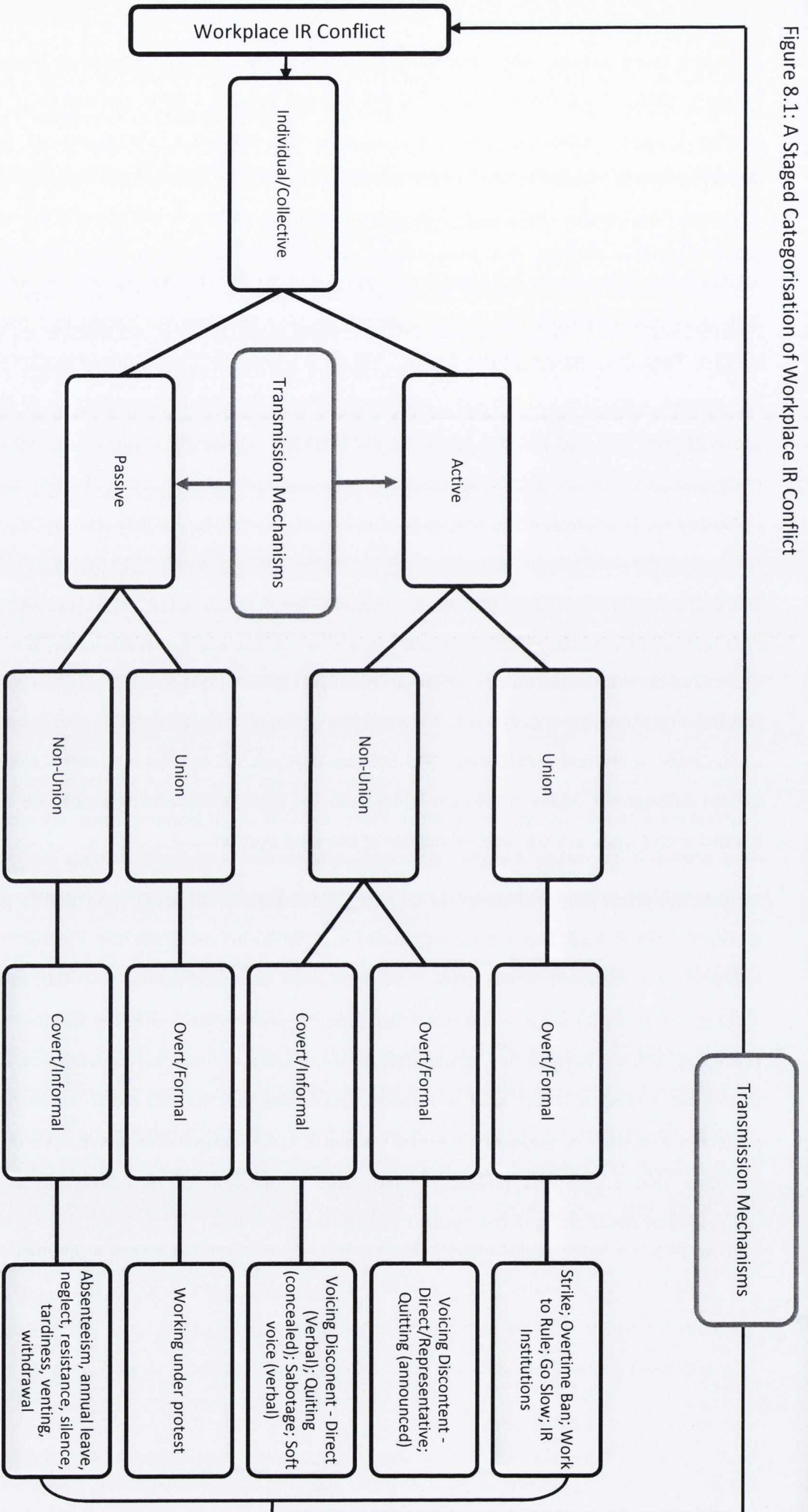
As noted, many writers used dimensions to describe the nature of workplace IR conflict (Gall & Hebdon, 2008). Using these dimensions the findings signal a shift in the nature of workplace IR conflict towards individual, covert and passive characteristics. This contrasts with previous literature which considers IR conflict as collective, overt, and active. Further, an additional dimension, union/non-union was suggested in the data.

Arising from the largely individualised expression of IR conflict evident in this study, the individual-collective dimension alone does not provide an adequate insight into the nature of IR conflict. Therefore, based on the findings, Figure 8.1 presents the nature of workplace IR conflict in a staged categorisation process. This Figure reflects the other characteristics of IR conflict and presents the series of choices faced by participants. Individual, or group of individuals, upon recognising IR conflict, decide between active and passive responses. It should be noted at this juncture that both approaches can be pursued by an individual or group. Following on from this is the union/non-union dimension where employee(s) consider whether to engage the Trade Union. While this approach differs from union mobilisation, it is consistent with the case data. Finally, employee(s) choose between overt and covert, or formal and informal, options. Arising from these choices are the array of workplace IR conflict expressions located on the right. The Figure positions transmission mechanisms between the active-passive dimension, and in a feedback loop to illustrate how the approach taken to the expression of IR conflict may adapt mid-cycle and/or inform subsequent cycles. These dynamics, and the factors influencing employee selection of IR conflict expression, are considered further in the next section.

In sum, this study demonstrates that despite a decline in strike activity, IR conflict persists in the workplace. Therefore, this author concludes that strike action is not the only or most accurate indicator of IR conflict. While there is no indication of a decline in IR conflict in this research setting, the study indicates – based on participants' experience – that the nature of IR conflict is changing. While many have speculated that IR conflict may be moving toward individual expression (Hebdon, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Saundry & Dix, 2014), there has been little empirical evidence to support this view (Godard, 2011, 2014). This qualitative empirical study confirms that employees pursue individualised expression of IR conflict in-parallel. This is reinforced by other shifts in the nature of IR conflict.



Figure 8.1: A Staged Categorisation of Workplace IR Conflict



The findings suggest that, along with individual expression, employees favour covert and passive forms of IR conflict. In this regard, the study supports the idea that IR conflict expressions have become more embedded (Godard, 2011). Further, there seems to be a marginalisation of Trade Unions in the expression of IR conflict. The data shows that participants were reluctant to engage with the union in general, and specifically with regard to strike action. The strike – as the centrepiece of the union arsenal – was considered ineffective, costly and unviable due to a lack of solidarity amongst employees and a likely backlash from the media. This further signals the individualisation of IR conflict, and the inadequacy of focusing on the strike expression in IR research. Cognisant of Hyman (1989:108 cited in Godard, 2011) and his warnings on predicting the continuation of trends, it should be recognised that this research makes no predictions regarding the furtherance of IR conflict in this manner. Rather it is asserted, based on the data, that at this time in this setting, the nature of IR conflict exhibits individual, covert, passive and non-union characteristics.

#### DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT

The underdeveloped understanding of IR conflict with regard to its nature, dynamics, and development in the workplace has been highlighted by Hebdon and Noh (2013:26) who state that "[r]elatively little is known about the complex inter-relationships between the various expressions of workplace [IR] conflict", and as such "enquiries must be conducted into the nature of workplace IR conflict and its dynamics". Despite recent attention, this issue is longstanding in the IR conflict literature. Margerison (1969:273) writes:

"... the formulation and application of rules is an important aspect of industrial relations, but it is by no means the central core. Insofar as this is Flanders' concept of industrial relations it narrows the scope of inquiry to the regulation of conflict. This is a very serious limitation, for it tends to ignore the essential element of all industrial relations, that of the nature and development of conflict itself"

This section discusses how the findings of the study contribute to our understanding of the dynamics and development of workplace IR conflict. Particular attention is paid to how employees choose between the range of IR conflict expressions. Despite the individualised and non-union nature of IR conflict, the findings demonstrate that a consistent set of expressions were used within and across cases. Therefore, this section also develops theory regarding how IR conflict expressions are replicated across the workplace collective.

#### **Choosing Between Expressions: Complements or Substitutes?**

Employees express workplace IR conflict in a wide variety of ways. Resulting from the individualised pursuit of IR conflict expression, the findings suggest that employees use a market

type calculus when choosing between expressions of IR conflict. Thus, extending the work of Scheuer (2006), the findings indicate that employees consider not only strike action in the context of other IR conflict expressions but that these expressions themselves are considered in the context of each other. In addition to individual preferences, three factors were used to select an expression of IR conflict in the data: supply, utility, and cost. Workplace IR Conflict expressions were considered on their own merit, and relative to other expressions.

The findings support Hirschman (1970) who posited that when exit is restricted, employees will choose voice. However, this logic can be extended. In addition to supply, this research emphasises the influence of relative utility and cost when choosing between expressions. In this regard expressions of workplace IR conflict undergo a process of cost-benefit analysis. This is consistent with Lewin and Ichniowski (1987) who conclude that employees compare the cost and effectiveness of grievances to that of quitting. Similarly, Bemmels and Foley (1996:365) state in the context of initiating grievance procedures; "[t]he central argument is that employees who feel unfairly treated will compare the cost and effectiveness of filing a grievance with their other response options (such as exit or "silence") in deciding whether to file a grievance". However, this study provides empirical evidence that, beyond cost and benefits of exit and voice, individual employees consider the range of expressions at their disposal *within* the workplace. The relative supply, utility, and cost are evaluated by the individual employee in the context of their preferences for each expression of IR conflict. For example, the case data shows that for many employees quitting is curtailed. Thus, they choose from an array of remaining expressions. Some consider grievances costly and ineffective, while others hold a different view. Similarly, supply of expressions within the boundary of the employment relationship influence employees' choice of expression. When annual leave is curtailed, employees described the use of absenteeism and/or resistance. This confirms Gall and Hebdon's (2008) concept of method displacement.

Interestingly, Cappelli and Chauvin (1991) argue that, in the context of higher wages and limited alternative employment, employees are less likely to use withdrawal mechanisms such as absenteeism and more likely to engage in grievance-filing. However, in this setting participants described a reluctance to pursue grievance procedures on the basis that (i) these were ineffective, and (ii) due to a preference for informal, direct voice. This may be indicative of different cost and utility structures, and/or the shift toward covert and passive expressions of IR conflict. Further, the study indicates the importance of individual preferences in the appraisal of the other factors. Therefore the findings support Bamberger *et al.* (2008) who found that the use of grievance mechanisms was determined by the individual's *subjective* utility, relative to the same for other means of conflict expression.

Extensive debate has centred on whether IR conflict expressions are complements or substitutes (Hebdon & Stern, 1998, 2003; Hebdon, 2005; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). While some evidence has been provided to support the substitution hypothesis on the organisational level, this has generally pertained to settings where structural features prohibit strike action (Hebdon & Stern, 2003; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). However, providing support for Gall and Hebdon's (2008) related concept of method displacement, this study suggests that 'market intervention' to change the supply, cost, or utility of expressions influences how employees choose between expressions. Curtailing annual leave, as above, can trigger other expressions including voluntary absenteeism. Similarly, the use of monitoring systems for tardiness or increased medical certification for absenteeism increase the costs of expression causing the employee to re-appraise their menu of options.

Alternatively, expressions of IR conflict can be considered complements where, using the iceberg hypothesis, overt expressions such as strike action are above the waterline, and covert expressions are found below (Sapsford and Turnbull, 1994). However, this perspective while useful in considering differences in visibility, assumes that a decline in strike is indicative of a decline in all other expressions. The research findings of this study call into question this assumption: the strike is just one amongst a range of expressions. Despite decline in strike activity, the findings demonstrate that IR conflict persists.

This study suggests, cognisant of individualised expression and individualised interpretation of supply, utility, and cost factors, that IR conflict expressions are likely complements for some employees and substitutes for others. These factors are a function of the individual employee and their workplace, and as such are likely to differ widely within and beyond organisations. These factors are also influenced by the subjective experience of IR conflict. A particularly aggrieved employee may, for example, pursue absenteeism *and* annual leave to escape the workplace while another, somewhat aggrieved, employee may only select one of these expressions, viewing them as substitutes. In the absence of reductionist assumptions of *ceteris paribus*, the expression and nature of IR conflict is too varied and complex to establish stable aggregate relationships between expressions of IR conflict. Thus, despite some evidence of substitution dynamics at the individual level which supports existing literature (Gall & Hebdon, 2008), predicting an aggregate pattern of substitutes and complements is not feasible in this study. Further, this level of variation may explain why "literature has yet to conceptually or empirically deal with why or under what circumstances, a complementary or trade-off relationship prevails amongst different forms of workplace [IR] conflict at the organisational level" (Hebdon & Noh, 2013:35). This research

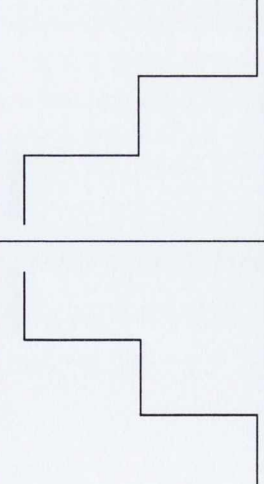
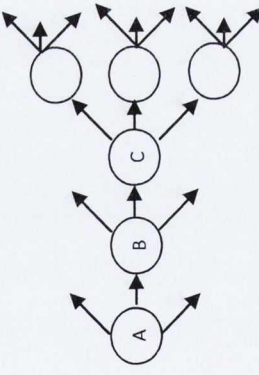
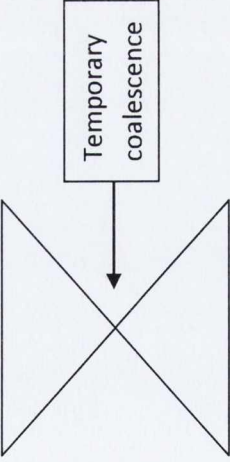
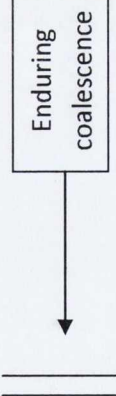
highlights the human nuance of this human process which, combined with context features, is unlikely to be captured by a one-size-fits-all approach.

In sum these findings indicate that employees evaluate expressions using a sophisticated calculus: cost versus benefits in the context of supply constraints. Interestingly, however, participants used this calculus to evaluate their personal costs and personal benefit with little consideration afforded to the collective. This reaffirms the individualisation of IR conflict and the limited solidarity between employees in this context. While there was some evidence to support method displacement (Gall & Hebdon, 2008) on an individual level, this author makes no claim as to the aggregate complement-substitute relationship between expressions. Rather, it is concluded on the basis of the complex and varied nature of IR conflict that expressions will be complements for some employees, and substitutes for others. In this regard, efforts to manage IR conflict – or pursue intervention in the market for IR conflict expressions – can trigger unpredictable effects.

#### **The Expression of IR Conflict: Development and Transmission in the Workplace**

The findings confirm that employees, in the main, pursued individual expressions of IR conflict. However, the set of expressions used by employees was consistent within and across cases, demonstrating some form of coalescence around the expression of IR conflict. Mulholland (2004) argues that behaviours such as absenteeism and sabotage are not individual because of a pattern of understanding between employees. Similarly, Junor *et al.* (2009) find evidence to suggest that voluntary absenteeism was "tacitly agreed" between employees as a way to affirm collective rights. In this regard seemingly individual expressions can be considered as 'covert collective action' (Hebdon, 2005). However, there was little evidence of collusion or co-ordination amongst employees in the case data. In this regard, the expressions of IR conflict were replicated *across* the collective but not *by* the collective where employees expressed IR conflict in-parallel, not in-concert. The findings suggest that IR conflict expressions develop in the workplace through a number of transmission mechanisms. Four were identifiable in the data. These are presented in Table 8.1 which provides patterns of expression development and a descriptive sketch, or vignette, derived from the data to illustrate how individual expression is developed and replicated in the workplace.

Table 8.1: Transmission Mechanisms and Patterns of Workplace IR Conflict Development

Transmission Mechanism	Pattern of Expression & Replication	Vignette
Non-Resolution: Escalation & De-Escalation		<p>Employee A, feeling aggrieved, pursues informal and direct voice. The matter is seemingly unresolved or ignored by management. Subsequently, Employee A escalates their individual action to formal direct voice in the form of a written complaint. Resolution is not secured. Employee A, rulling out direct voice, decides that 'no one is listening', de-escalates their response and expresses IR conflict through acquiescent silence, venting, and other withdrawal expressions. Employee B is also aggrieved but has observed the non-resolution of Employee A's conflict. Consequently, Employee B rules out direct voice and proceeds directly to the flight response.</p>
Contagion Effects		<p>Employee A holds some grievance with management and responds by 'going sick'. This increases workload for remaining employees, causing discontent in the employment relationship. Employee B also responds by 'going sick'. Following this pattern of absenteeism, management seek to preserve staffing levels and proactively guard against unpredictable attendance by curtailing annual leave. Employee C is also experiencing IR conflict, however their selected mode of withdrawal - annual leave - is now curtailed. Thus, Employee C must, facing compromised supply of their chosen expression, pursue an alternative expression creating 'method displacement' (Gall &amp; Hebdon, 2008).</p>
Venting & The Creation of Shared Reactance		<p>Employee A is dissatisfied with management and, experiencing anger over the issue, seeks solace in friends/colleagues - Employees B and C. Employees B and C echo Employee A's discontent and agree that management are 'ridiculous'. While Employee A feels better - justified in their discontent - Employee B's dissatisfaction grows as they now recognise the issue arising more and more. Employee B pursues venting extensively along with other flight expressions - silence and withdrawal of effort. Employee C finds both the substance of the IR conflict and the ongoing venting stressful. Consequently, Employee C pursues direct voice and complains to management.</p>
Culture		<p>Employees A and B are long-standing employees. They have a particular way of doing everything in the workplace. Employee C is relatively new to the workplace and observes employees A and B to learn how the work is done, how the workplace operates, and how to 'fit in'. Employee A and B are aggrieved with the manager and respond by withdrawing effort. Employee C, having learned to replicate the behaviour of employees A and B, follows suit.</p>

As noted in Chapter 2, our understanding of how IR conflict develops in the workplace is limited. This has arisen due to: the focus of IR conflict research on strike activity (Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005); the tendency to research only one or two expressions at a time (Hebdon & Noh, 2013); and to focus on the most visible, measurable and accessible of expressions of workplace IR conflict (Franzosi, 1989). Despite these limitations some attempts have been made to explore how IR conflict develops in the workplace. Most recently Hebdon and Noh (2013) provide quantitative evidence indicating that grievances are positively associated with collective job actions, and job actions are in turn positively associated with strikes. Thus, employees pursue a step-by-step escalation following non-resolution of IR conflict issues. Inclusive of more covert expressions, this study provides qualitative empirical support for this escalation theory of IR conflict development. The findings indicate that, following non-resolution, some participants escalated their response. In many instances this related to the gradual approach to formality in voicing discontent but also involved moving from direct voice to representative voice, and further from union representative voice to legal representative voice. Escalation, illustrated as a step-up process in Table 7.1, is therefore confirmed in this study as a pattern of IR conflict development.

In addition, the findings identify a pattern of de-escalation. Participants also explained that following expression of IR conflict and non-resolution, they often moved from active to passive expressions. This signals that following expression and non-resolution, employees re-evaluate their menu of IR conflict expressions using their calculus to decide between escalation and de-escalation. Thus, de-escalation, illustrated as a step-down process in Table 8.1, represents another pattern of IR conflict development.

The study identifies three additional transmission mechanisms, each of which replicate IR conflict expressions across the workplace. The findings indicate that IR conflict expressions are contagious. This is consistent with Akkerman and Torenvlied (2010) who found that strikes exhibit contagious properties within and beyond the organisation. Beyond any singular expression, this study concludes that IR conflict expressions are broadly contagious where individual action is observed by, or has consequences for, colleagues. While participants stressed that the 'work did not suffer' it was clear from management and employees alike that - following individual expressions of absenteeism or withdrawal of effort - *other employees* did suffer. Drawing on Gall and Hebdon (2008) and the notion that management ultimately control the power of remedy, individual expression of IR conflict can either trigger new issues of IR conflict or exacerbate existing ones. Thus, contagion effects trigger further individual expression which in turn triggers contagion effects.

The third transmission mechanism evident in the data relates to the use of venting where employees temporarily coalesced around their mutual, and semi-collective, *recognition* of IR conflict. At this point, illustrated in Table 8.1 as 'temporary coalescence', we would traditionally expect collective action to arise. However following this temporary coalescence, employees disperse. Awoken to the substance and extent of IR conflict, they decide individually whether and how to express IR conflict. This is reminiscent of Bartunek *et al.* (2008) who identify the creation of shared meaning in their model of collective turnover. In combining shared meaning with the concept of reactance (Jaffee, 2007), venting as an expression of IR conflict triggers 'shared reactance' where employees become aware of IR conflict and are motivated to respond in some way. However, the decision to respond and how to respond was described in individual terms. Thus, this seemingly innocuous practice, through its creation of shared reactance amongst employees, transmits IR conflict expression across the collective. There was evidence to suggest that some employees were aware of this mechanism and used venting to implicitly promote action in others where they themselves considered action beyond venting too costly. Further, participants explained that venting high levels of reactance led to an aversive working environment which precipitated, in some instances, employee withdrawal. In this regard, the study identifies venting as both an expression of IR conflict and a transmission mechanism for further expressions.

Workplace culture is the final transmission mechanism identified in this study. This is illustrated in Table 8.1 as enduring coalescence. Participants attributed coalescence of IR conflict expression to a cohesive sub-culture. This supports Edwards (1979:97) who states that "even the most individual actions may reflect group pressures and institutional norms, and cannot simply be contrasted with apparently more organised behaviour". Drawing on the links between culture and homogeneity (Schein, 1984), the study indicates that employees within a strong cohesive culture are likely to pursue similar expressions of IR conflict. In this regard, employees are inducted into how IR conflict is 'done' in a particular workplace and learn by observing their colleagues. Peer pressure may also transmit expressions where the desire to 'fit in' motivates consistent expression of IR conflict.

Each of these transmission mechanisms was evident in each of case. As such, they did not occur in isolation. Figure 8.2 illustrates how these mechanisms can interact to replicate IR conflict, and its expression, across the workplace.



Figure 8.2: Interacting Transmission Mechanisms and the Development of Workplace IR Conflict

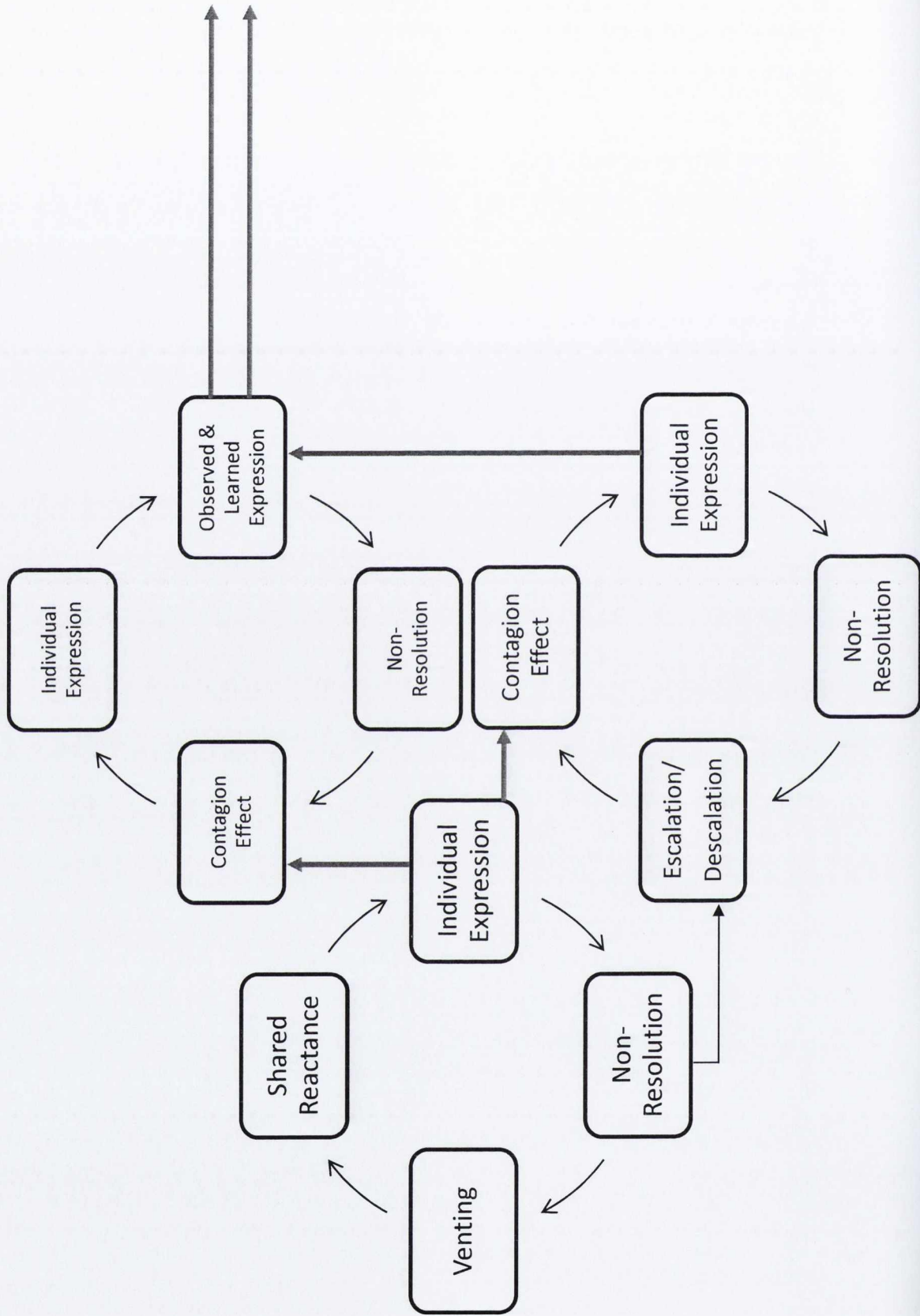


Figure 8.2 illustrates that when one transmission mechanism interacts with another, IR conflict can be replicated across the workplace without explicit or conscious co-ordination. For example, if employee A pursues venting and triggers shared reactance and subsequent expression of IR conflict in employees B and C there is scope for (i) contagion effects as other colleagues are effected by individual expression; (ii) escalation or de-escalation if the issue of IR conflict is unresolved - which may result in further contagion effects and further expression of IR conflict; and (iii) a culture where, following a series of expressions over a period of time, employees learn how IR conflict is expressed in a particular setting. This example, as illustrated in Figure 8.2, is not to say that any one mechanism is the starting point. Rather, the purpose here is to illustrate how IR conflict expressions can develop organically in the workplace. In this regard, there exists an individualised expression of IR conflict replicated across the collective but not pursued by the collective.

In review, owing to the largely singular focus of IR conflict research, little is known about how IR conflict develops in the workplace. Adding to the recent work of Hebdon and Noh (2013), this study begins to address this gap. The findings demonstrate that while a variety of IR conflict expressions are used in the workplace, a consistent set of expressions were described by participants both within and across the four cases. However, despite this consistency, the findings demonstrate a preference for individual and non-union expression of IR conflict. The study demonstrates that aside from intentional and active collusion, there are four mechanisms by which IR conflict expressions can be replicated or transmitted in the workplace.

First, this study confirms that following non-resolution, employees can escalate their response (Hebdon & Noh, 2013). However the study also provides qualitative evidence that employees can also de-escalate their response where they re-assess the threat alongside supply, utility and cost factors before proceeding. Second, the findings demonstrate that IR conflict – similar to the strike expression (Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2010) – has contagious properties. Drawing on management's power of remedy (Gall & Hebdon, 2008), individual expression can trigger new conflicts with management, or exacerbate existing ones. Thus, IR conflict expressions are replicated through the intermediate impact of individual expressions of IR conflict on colleagues. Third, workplace culture or sub-culture, known for its homogenising properties (Schein, 1984), creates enduring coalescence where employees become indoctrinated into a particular way of expressing IR conflict. Finally, the findings demonstrate that venting acts as a mechanism that triggers 'shared reactance'. This seemingly modest expression of IR conflict creates temporary coalescence around the identification of IR conflict before employees disperse, each considering

their own individual response to threat. These threat responses and the range of IR conflict expressions underpinning them are discussed in the ensuing section.

### **8.3 WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT: RESPONSES AND EXPRESSIONS**

The basis for this study was the focus of previous IR research on strike expression despite declining strike activity, and a longstanding view that IR conflict is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. In this regard, the research sought to make a descriptive and theoretical contribution by exploring how employees express IR conflict. The findings confirmed the existence of an array of IR conflict expressions and in some instances identified additional variants within particular expressions. Further, these expressions were clustered inductively to create a framework of employee responses to IR conflict.

#### **THE THREAT RESPONSE THEORY OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT: FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE-FIX**

Hirschman (1970) and Farrell (1983) have provide frameworks, Exit-Voice and ELVN, to classify responses to conflict. However, as noted in Chapter 2, these approaches have limitations. First, while Exit-Voice and ELVN adaptations (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Withey & Cooper, 1989; Allen & Tüselman, 2009) have been extended to include a variety of ways to include expressions of IR conflict beyond quitting (exit) and voice, the range of expressions identified in previous literature, and the case data were not fully captured. The most central omission in this regard relates to the use of resistance as an expression of IR conflict (Fox, 1966). These frameworks fail to recognise that resistance, neither completely active nor completely passive, can simultaneously combine exit and voice (Edwards *et al.*, 1995).

Second, Hirschman's (1970) Exit-Voice framework was developed with broad applicability relating to employees, consumers and citizens. However, the power asymmetry and interdependence that characterise the employment relationship (Sexton, 1996; Blyton & Turnbull, 1994) are not well reflected (Edwards *et al.*, 1995:289). Consequently, Exit-Voice underestimates the costs faced by employees in the expression of workplace IR conflict.

While considered as seminal works, Exit-Voice and ELVN are not broad enough to capture the array of IR conflict expressions, nor do they recognise the specificities of the employment relationship. Consequently, ELVN alongside resistance was included as a 'placeholder' (Maxwell, 2013) in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2. Therefore, in line with the integrated inductive and deductive approach to data analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) this study proposes the Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict. This framework identifies four responses to workplace IR conflict: Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix. These categories were inductively

derived from the case data and linked, upon iterative review, with extant psycho-physiology theory (Bracha *at al.*, 2004; Schmidt *et al.*, 2008). In this regard, Fight, Flight, and Freeze concepts are used in these disciplines to consider responses in conditions of acute stress or threat (*ibid*). The Fix response was derived on a purely inductive basis where participants themselves described fixing responses to workplace IR conflict. While closely related to voice and exit, the concepts of fight and flight offer a more inclusive categorisation of employee expressions of workplace IR conflict. The term exit, largely synonymous with quitting, obscures the wide variety of withdrawal expressions pursued by employees. Similarly voice, particularly in its contemporary form (Bagchi, 2011; Budd, 2014), includes a wide variety of expressions which warrant attention in their own right. The findings also demonstrate that resistance is a common expression of IR conflict. This behaviour is well captured in the freeze response. Therefore, Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix offers a more inclusive categorisation of the array of IR conflict expressions.

Perhaps more significantly however this approach is sensitive to specificities of the employment relationship. In the workplace context, IR conflict - as frustration of goals - can be conceptualised as stress (Fried, 1993) or threat due to the power imbalance between the parties and the high level of interdependence. Thus, this framework is better equipped to consider employee responses to IR conflict by acknowledging employee risk where, cognisant of disciplinary action and the reach of managerial capitalism (Godard, 2011), employees appraise the costs of expressing IR conflict. In this regard, the author concludes that employees - when expressing IR conflict - are essentially responding to threat within an interdependent system. The following section presents the Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix responses. In doing so, the section highlights how our understanding of selected IR conflict expressions is extended by this study.

### **Fight**

The strike expression - as the most active and visible of fight expressions - was described by participants. However, as discussed, participants were reluctant to use, or threaten this expression. With reference to the data, the fight response was most closely related to voicing discontent. The data demonstrates that voicing discontent can arise in a variety of ways. In line with Harlos (2001) employees used both formal and informal mechanisms. However, reflective of the shift toward covert expression, there was a clear preference for informal voice.

Luchak's (2003) direct-representative distinction was also confirmed in the data. Departing from Freeman and Medoff (1984), employees described a preference for direct, non-representative voice. Demonstrative of the seeming marginalisation of Trade Unions, there was also evidence of legal representative voice. However, some managers held the view that this form was not

necessarily as effective as union representation. The reluctance to seek union intervention, and the difficulty faced by local union representatives, provides further evidence of the individualisation of IR conflict.

In addition to voicing discontent, there was some evidence of the use sabotage to fight management, and express IR conflict. The findings also indicate that employees may use absenteeism in this regard to purposefully cause difficulty around staffing. However evidence of this behaviour was limited. Some participants described property destruction where employees - frustrated with issues of IR conflict - became aggressive and caused damage to equipment. This was reminiscent of Taylor and Walton (1971 cited in Eldridge, 1973) and frustration-based sabotage. In the main however, participants explained that sabotage was not pursued by employees. The research context of healthcare emerged as an important variable in this regard.

### **Flight**

Within the flight response, employees sought to pull away from the employment relationship either physically, cognitively or affectively. Thus, this response included quitting. However, in this setting quitting was largely considered unviable due to a lack of alternative employment. In this regard, the study provides support for Hirschman (1970), and others (Lewin & Ichniowski, 1986; Bemmels & Foley, 1996) where quitting is considered with respect to available employment. The data indicates - even within the Medlab setting - that different groups face different supply conditions which inform their appraisal of quitting, and other expressions.

Remaining within the boundary of the employment relationship, the study identifies the 'waste' of annual leave as an expression of IR conflict to temporarily escape the workplace. This expression, subject to low visibility, was identified by participants as a way of escaping dissatisfaction in the employment relationship. In many regards it mirrored the use of absenteeism which was also confirmed as an expression of IR conflict. Providing support for existing literature in organisational (De Boer *et al.*, 2002) and IR paradigms (Bean, 1975; Hebdon & Gall, 2008; Taylor *et al.*, 2010) - the use of involuntary and voluntary absenteeism were confirmed empirically as expressions of IR conflict. Indicative of the complexity of IR conflict - and human behaviour - the motives underpinning absenteeism were varied. Consistent with De Boer *et al.* (2002) and Tietrick and Fried (1993), the findings indicate that absenteeism arises involuntarily due to work-related stress caused by IR conflict. A common motive underpinning voluntary absence as an expression of IR conflict was consistent with De Boer (2002) and the idea that absenteeism is used to escape the workplace. While Luchak and Gellatly (1996) argue that absenteeism could also be considered as a form of employee voice due to its ability to communicate information to the employer, the

findings demonstrate that the motives of voluntary absenteeism are often concealed. Thus, absenteeism seems inconsistent with the concept of voice, and its focus on communication (Bagchi, 2011). The study also confirms the work of Junor *et al.* (2009) where employees can use absenteeism to resist management. However, drawing on Gall and Hebdon (2008), the findings suggest that absenteeism may appear as resistance whilst hiding underlying method displacement. In addition to these motives, employees described a quid-pro-quo motive underpinning voluntary absenteeism.

Despite the variety of motives underpinning voluntary absenteeism, and the inherent difficulty in discerning between sickness absence and other forms, participants used a number of indicators to identify absenteeism as a response to IR conflict. Providing support for Luchak and Gellatly (1996), frequency of absence was used as an indicator of voluntary absence. In addition participants used: absence preceding or following an authorised absence; patterns of absence; self-certified absence; certified absence referencing workplace stress, or absence arises following an issue of workplace IR conflict. Notably beyond a quantified metric, HR/IR managers focused on understanding the local patterns of relations.

While some participants identified tardiness as an expression of IR conflict, many explained that discipline was a deterrent. In this regard, the costs of tardiness can exceed absenteeism where employees conceal motives using sickness or medical certification.

In addition to quitting, absenteeism and tardiness, employees described non-physical forms of flight including: silence; venting; withdrawal of effort, cooperation, commitment and social withdrawal; and neglect. Key amongst these expressions was silence, and venting. Employee silence was evident throughout the cases where employees intentionally withheld information from management. In line with Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Van Dyne *et al.* (2003), employees pursued this response for due to fear of retribution (defensive silence), and due to a resigned believe that the workplace would never change (acquiescent silence). Adding to these types of silence, 'they should know silence' and social silence emerged in the data. Often involving issues of equity and performance, employees withheld information about workplace problems based on the view that management should know and should address these issues accordingly. Employees also used 'the silent treatment' to express IR conflict.

The findings provide further evidence to support Richards' (2008) work on the construct of venting. This concept is similar to what Budd (2014) terms 'sideways voice'. However, venting occurred amongst colleagues and was typically described in conjunction with silence toward management. Further, participants themselves used the term venting. Motives included catharsis,

social proof, and implicitly encouraging action-orientated employees to pursue more active expressions of IR conflict. As noted in Section 8.2, the study demonstrates that venting is both an expression of IR conflict and a transmission mechanism.

With regard to the other non-physical forms of flight, the study confirms the use of withdrawal of effort and withdrawal of cooperation as expressions of IR conflict identified previously in IR conflict literature (Turkington, 1975; Barbash, 1979; Harrison, 2001; Gall & Hebdon, 2008). However, withdrawal of commitment and social withdrawal are also identified as expressions of IR conflict. While the concept of commitment has received much attention from the HR perspective, its withdrawal as an expression of IR conflict receives much less systematic attention in IR research. This signals a potential area of valuable integration between the fields.

### **Freeze**

The freeze response, where employees attempted to maintain their position in the employment relationship, centred on the use of resistance as an expression of IR conflict. Resistance is considered in existing IR conflict literature as an overarching construct including an array of non-strike behaviours - termed here and elsewhere - as expressions of IR conflict. This research, informed by writings from management and organisational paradigms, considered resistance more narrowly. Providing support for Dent and Goldberg (1999) writing from an OB perspective, the findings confirm that employees resist loss as an expression of IR conflict. However, contrasting somewhat with Dent and Goldberg (1999), the findings indicate that employees also resist change to express IR conflict. In addition to these forms, the data demonstrates that employees resist more as an expression of IR conflict where they seek to avoid additional work, hours, or responsibility. This form of resistance is likely to be more prominent in the current resource constrained environment (Harney & Monks, 2013; Russell & McGinnity, 2014; Teague & Roche, 2014). Underpinning these forms of resistance, the study identifies resistance as revenge where it was used to 'push back' at management following an unresolved issue of workplace IR conflict. This feature of resistance as an expression of IR conflict arises due to the repeated interaction that characterises the employment relationship, and illustrates how each cycle of IR conflict feeds into future interactions between the parties. These expressions are not well reflected in existing Exit-Voice or ELVN frameworks.

## Fix

Some participants described a fixing response to IR conflict where upon reactance, they sought to identify solutions to management regarding the substance of the dissatisfaction. While departing from our traditional conceptualisation of IR conflict expressions, soft voice was described by *participants* as an expression of IR conflict. In this regard, its inclusion here is consistent of Pondy (1979) who explains that conflict behaviours should be defined by participants themselves. This response was common amongst senior clinical and laboratory staff but was identifiable in other workplace groups, and local level union representatives. This indicates that the fix response may be related to employee empowerment. The identification of the fix response, and the employee pursuit of solutions as an expression of IR conflict reflects the pluralist approach of this study. In this regard, IR conflict is not considered illegitimate and its expressions are not considered negatively.

Soft voice was in some instances dismissed as voicing discontent and ignored by management. In such circumstances, employees described re-assessing their menu of expressions and the pursuit a different - and typically more passive - responses. In this regard separating soft voice from voicing discontent is conceptually, if not practically, useful for understanding these differing expressions of IR conflict.

While existing IR conflict research has focused on the strike expression (Godard, 2011; Hebdon & Noh, 2013), this study confirms the existence and use of a wide variety of IR conflict expressions. In this regard, the author concludes that the focus on the strike expression is misplaced. This study contributes to the IR literature by providing an empirically-supported description of the range of IR conflict expressions in the workplace, and in some instances, identifying variants within existing expressions. A further contribution is provided in the Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix framework which offers an alternative, more inclusive way to cluster expressions of IR conflict into employee responses. Further, this framework is sensitive to the power imbalance and interdependence of IR conflict, and as such recognises that expressions of IR pose risks to employees.

Drawing together conclusions from this section and the last, the study suggests that the visibility of IR conflict in its current state is lessened by the variety of IR conflict expressions available to employees combined with individualised pursuit. In this regard, IR conflict is not the outright battle of the strike but rather a situation of 'guerrilla *workfare*' where an employee - or group of employees - can pursue IR conflict while hiding in plain sight. Thus, this research highlights that



beyond the dramatic and overt, there is value in researching – with sensitive methods – the subtle, day-to-day experience of IR conflict in the workplace.

#### **8.4 THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE IR CONFLICT**

The impact of IR conflict on the workplace is most often considered in terms of productivity and working days lost. It is argued that this approach - owing to the research focus on strikes - limits our understanding of IR conflict and its significance. The research objective sought to more broadly explore the nature of IR conflict. Underpinning this objective, the second research question investigated the impact of IR conflict on the workplace from a more holistic standpoint. In this regard, the study highlights the value of Pondy's (1967, 1992) lenses: productivity, adaptability and stability.

The study examined participants' assessment of how IR conflict impacts on the workplace. Therefore, in line with the qualitative approach, the study makes no claim about the extent of impact. While IR conflict was linked by participants with a loss of workplace productivity in the context of absenteeism or withdrawal of effort, participants emphasised the role of colleagues in carrying that burden. However this view may be rooted in the research context. With reference to the contagion effects transmission mechanism discussed in Section 8.2, the findings indicate that while an initial loss of productivity may be offset by other employees, there may be further implications regarding the spread of IR conflict and its expressions.

Beyond productivity, the findings demonstrate that IR conflict impacts on the ability of a workplace to pursue and implement change. Participants explained the difficulty in implementing any change in the context of IR conflict. Freeze responses are particularly salient in this regard. The study demonstrates that IR conflict delayed change, resulted in non-implementation, and eroded the managerial change agenda.

Perhaps owing to the nature of the setting and the centrality of the patient, the impact of IR conflict on stability was most notable. The study demonstrates that IR conflict can undermine service delivery and detract from the pursuit of the organisational mission. In this research, managerial participants - often quite distraught - described a struggle to maintain staffing levels in the context of unpredictable attendance and felt that service delivery, and its quality, was threatened by IR conflict expressions. This is consistent with De Boer *et al.* (2002) who explain that absenteeism in the workplace is undesirable for employees and employers due to stagnation of work, high costs and increased workload for remaining employees. The healthcare sector is highly labour-intensive (McDermott & Keating, 2011, 2014), therefore maintaining predictable attendance is critical for workplace stability and ultimately service delivery.

The findings indicate that in this setting IR conflict also impacts quality of services and patient care. While participants were acutely aware of the patient - and stressed that the expression of IR conflict would never be pursued to the detriment of services - there was evidence of neglect and organisational errors. Participants linked these issues to IR conflict directly, or indirectly through workplace stress. In this regard, IR conflict threatens the mission of the workplace.

Providing support for Abbott (2007), the findings suggest that IR conflict further threatens workplace stability by undermining the ability of management to manage. This supports Teague and Roche (2012) and Jones and Saundry (2012) who found that line managers exhibit a lack of confidence in managing conflict. The data demonstrates that management, aware of previous interactions with employees, feel reluctant to drive local level change, pursue discipline, and manage IR conflict. Therefore management are more concerned with 'keeping the peace' than "than achieving business objectives" (ibid:63). This state of 'managerial paralysis' is indicative of repeated and *successful* freeze responses to IR conflict where, drawing on Pondy (1967) and Weingart *et al.*, (2014), previous interactions inform future behaviour and expectations. Therefore, the impact of IR conflict on stability in terms of service delivery, mission and management's ability to manage, can be considered particularly significant. Thus the study demonstrates that, in line with Kerr (1954), these covert and individual expressions of IR conflict are not only more difficult to identify but more difficult to manage (see Eldridge, 1973:161).

This research, in exploring IR conflict more broadly, contributes by demonstrating empirically that the impact of IR conflict on the workplace is, like its expression, varied. While less dramatic than a sudden halt in production, the findings demonstrate that IR conflict in its non-strike forms impact on workplace productivity on a day-to-day basis. In the context of declining strike activity, impact in this regard is more meaningful than productivity loss from strikes. This research demonstrates, however, that the impact of IR conflict extends further than measures of productivity and working days lost as emphasised in existing literature (Briskin, 2007; Akkerman & Tornenvlied, 2010). The findings indicate that IR conflict impacts on the ability to pursue and implement change, and on stability in terms of service delivery and the pursuit of organisational mission. It is also evident in the findings that IR conflict - after repeated interactions - impacts on managerial ability leading to managerial paralysis. These concerns are central to workplace functioning. Owing, however, to the existence of transmission mechanisms, the research suggests that the replication of IR conflict and its expressions is perhaps the most systemic impact on the workplace.

## 8.5 THE NATURE OF IR CONFLICT IN A HEALTHCARE CONTEXT

This study is situated in a healthcare context. The findings highlight the role of context in influencing the nature, expression and impact of workplace IR conflict. The findings indicate that the expression of workplace IR conflict is shaped by three context factors: patient; professionals; and the media. The viability of certain expressions was linked to the patient. Sabotage was considered inappropriate in this context while strike action was further restricted by the impact - or perception thereof - on patients. In this regard, media scrutiny of the sector and its negative stance (Roche, 2010) also acted as a moderator of IR conflict expression. Thus, non-strike expressions of IR conflict may be more attractive in healthcare. These issues also served to proliferate IR conflict where a loyalty to the patient frustrated healthcare professionals in the context of imposed resource constraints. Further, the perception that the employer exploited this loyalty and negative media coverage to 'soften the ground' was particularly unwelcomed.

While IR theorists have moved toward the term employment relations to reflect changes in industry composition, research on worker resistance, or covert industrial conflict, has focused on blue collar workers (Edwards *et al.*, 1995) and, more recently, employees in call centres (Bain & Taylor, 2000; Mullholland, 2004; Belanger & Edwards, 2013). This study provides an insight into how powerful, collectivised professionals express IR conflict. The professional use of resistance as an expression of IR conflict, however, has further implications.

While some managerial participants held the view that 'good' professionals do not experience or express IR conflict, there was evidence to the contrary where participants, professional and non-professional, senior and junior, experienced and expressed IR conflict in the workplace. In particular, many participants discussed the use of voluntary absence in relation to 'non-professionals' or 'lower paid workers'. A common view regarding the use of absenteeism to express IR conflict centred on the understanding that such behaviour was confined to employees who were not professionally motivated. In contrast however, employees holding professional and clinical roles, described their own use of voluntary absenteeism to express IR conflict. Healthcare professionals have the power to "resist managerial interventions" (Currie *et al.*, 2008:543). This cohort can often defend, or conceal, the expression of IR conflict on the basis of organisational mission: patient care. Thus, the impact of professionally expressed IR conflict is far reaching.

The findings demonstrate that there are differences amongst occupational groups regarding *how* IR conflict is expressed where professionals frequently resist loss of status to express IR conflict. However, in the context of resource constraints and work intensification (Weber, 2011), the findings indicate that professionals are increasingly pursuing resistance to more. While

participants described quitting as a largely unviable expression of IR conflict, some non-professionals facing a greater supply of alternative employment considered it an option. Thus, indicative of this "classic pluralistic domain" (Denis *et al.*, 2001), different employee cohorts may also have different preferences, and face different levels of cost, supply, and utility associated with particular expressions.

The healthcare setting has long since exhibited limited ability with regard to change implementation (Mintzberg, 1997; McDermott & Keating, 2012, 2011, 2014). Change implementation in this setting is therefore a source of much attention. Despite the IR features of the setting, this process tends to be researched from context (Pettigrew *et al.*, 1992), structure (Denis *et al.*, 2001), and agency (Buchanan & Boddy, 1992; Buchanan *et al.*, 2007) perspectives. The findings demonstrate that resistance - including resistance to change, loss, more - and resistance as revenge are used to express IR conflict. Further, the impact of IR conflict on workplace adaptability is evidenced in this setting as delayed change, non-implementation, and compromised change. Finally, the study suggests that professionals pursuing resistance as an expression of IR conflict may be more successful due to their power, status, autonomy and knowledge asymmetry. Thus, non-strike IR conflict may go toward explaining the difficulties associated with change implementation in this context.

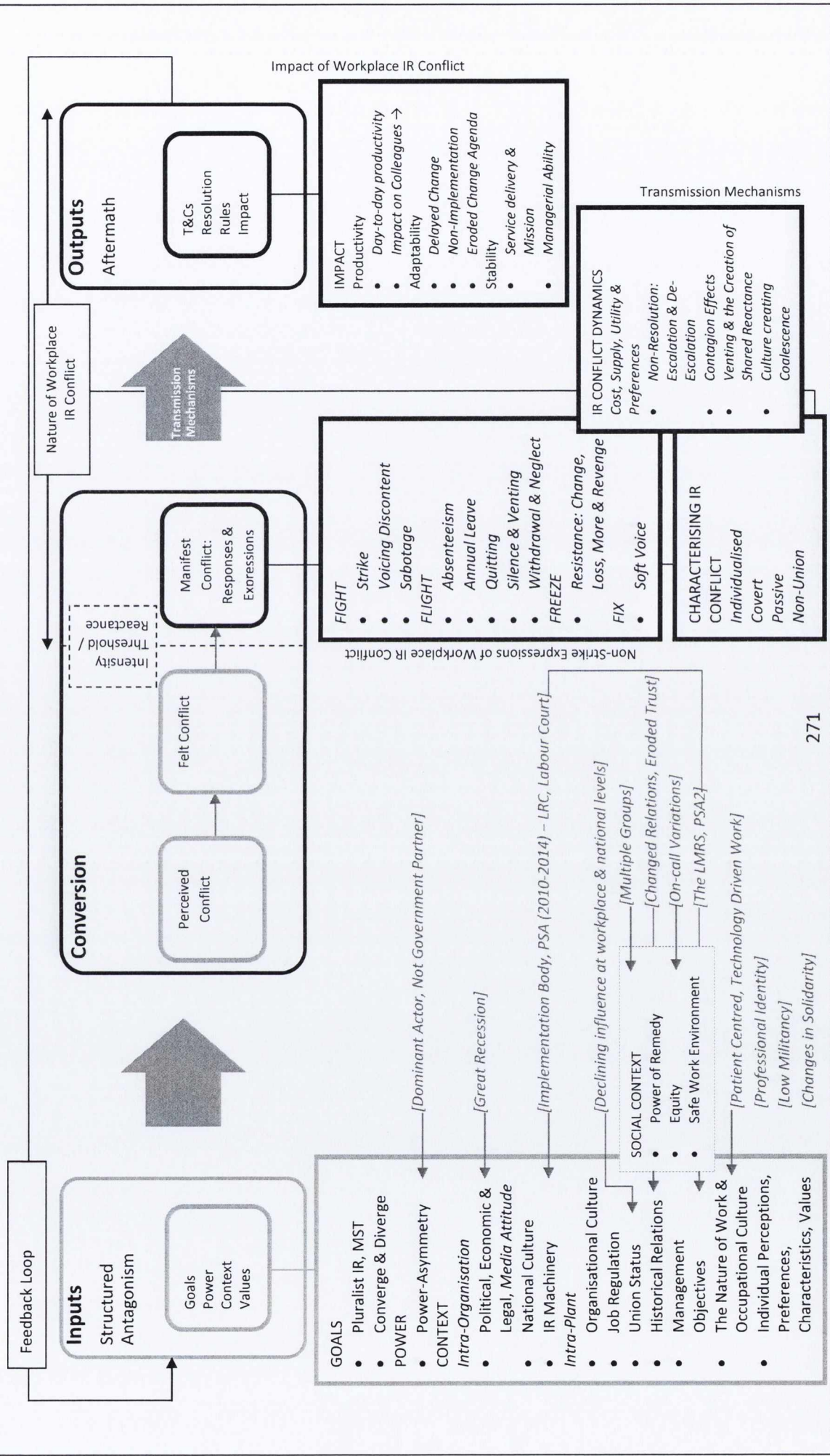
The study sought to explore, more broadly, the nature of IR conflict. To this end, the expression and impact of IR conflict was researched in a healthcare setting due to the IR features of the setting and its potential for IR conflict. Further, the seeming inconsistency between the perception of the setting as conflict-prone, against comparable strike activity, informed the selection of this research context. Factors influencing the nature, expression and impact of IR conflict evident in this sector are identified as patients, the media, and professionals. This research, making a secondary contribution to healthcare management literature, emphasises the value of the IR perspective. This is particularly salient with regard to change implementation. Despite strike activity in line with other sectors, there was significant evidence of IR conflict in this setting. However, it is interesting to consider whether the perception of the industry as conflict-prone - and its portrayal in the media is - in and of itself, a contributor to IR conflict in this setting.

## **8.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Weingart *et al.*, (2014:45) conclude that "the time is ripe for a new way to think about conflict" where a "focus on conflict expression also helps us to better understand the conflict process". This study sought to explore the nature of workplace IR conflict. In doing so, the researcher

examined the expression and impact of workplace IR conflict in a healthcare setting. The purpose of this Chapter was to delineate the research contributions and develop theory by 'enfolding literature' (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, at this juncture, Figure 8.3 revisits the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and integrates the main contributions of this research study.

- IR is concerned with the employment relationship as the panoply of relations between employer and employee(s), or representatives thereof. This relationship, predicated on exchange, and an economic and psychological employment contract, is highly interdependent and power asymmetric.
- Workplace IR Conflict is the action, or collective actions, that arise in or relate to the setting in which work is performed when one party in the interdependent and power-asymmetric employer-employee relationship perceives that another party in the relationship is frustrating, or about to frustrate, an important concern or goal relating to work, working conditions and/or the working environment.



In exploring how employees express workplace IR conflict, the findings demonstrate that it is not confined to one expression. The strike is but one of a multiplicity of ways that employees express workplace IR conflict. This study provides empirical confirmation of the existence and use of many expressions of IR conflict speculated to exist in the IR conflict literature. Further, the study extends our understanding of these expressions by identifying variants of expressions. Resistance to more and resistance as revenge emerged from the data, as did evidence of social withdrawal, withdrawal of commitment, and 'they should know' silence. Annual leave was also identified as an expression of IR conflict used to escape the workplace.

The research also provides an alternative framework of employee responses to IR conflict. Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix offers a more inclusive way to cluster expressions of IR conflict into employee responses. Specifically, resistance as an expression of IR conflict was not well served by existing frameworks. In addition, Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix is more sensitive to the power imbalance and interdependence that characterise IR conflict. Employees are not consumers, and the dynamics that characterise their interactions with management are nuanced. Essentially, when employees express IR conflict, they are responding to threat. This is incorporated into the Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix framework.

In answering the second research question, how does IR conflict impact on the workplace, the study demonstrates that the focus on strike action and working days lost has limited our view. In this regard, a contribution is made by highlighting the varied impact of IR conflict on the workplace. The findings demonstrate that beyond productivity, IR conflict impacts on the ability of a workplace to change and adapt to its environment. While this is necessary for survival, so too is the ability to provide service and pursue organisational mission. The findings highlight that IR conflict impacts on these concerns, and – more generally – the ability of management to manage. Thus, the focus on quantifying the impact of IR conflict in previous literature is overly myopic. By extending our view of impact IR scholars are presented with an opportunity to inform other disciplines, and vice versa.

The decline in strike activity has sparked much debate and speculation amongst IR scholars: 'what has happened to strikes?' (Godard, 2011). It has been surmised that IR conflict has become more individual; embedded; dormant; or that IR conflict is in decline (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994; Hebdon & Stern, 1998; Hebdon, 2005; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Saundry & Dix, 2014; Godard, 2011, 2014). However, there has been little empirical evidence to support these views. This research demonstrates that IR conflict exists in the workplace, and remains a central feature of the employment relationship. The study provides empirical support for the individualisation of IR conflict where employees are opting to pursue expressions of IR conflict

typically associated with individual IR conflict, and, more significantly, that employee(s) are pursuing these expressions individually. The findings also identify a shift toward the covert and informal expression of IR conflict, and thus provide support for Godard (2011) and the idea that IR conflict has 'gone underground'. Departing from the traditional view of IR conflict as synonymous with Trade Unions and strikes, the findings indicate the marginalisation of Trade Unions in the expression of IR conflict, and provide evidence of the passivisation of IR conflict. Employees - favouring passive over active expressions - have 'lost the will to fight'. Thus, in this setting, the study concludes that IR conflict is individualised, passive, covert and non-union.

Owing to the narrow focus of IR conflict research, previous literature provides little insight into the dynamics of IR conflict expression, or how it develops in the workplace. While this limitation stems in part from the narrow focus on the strike expression, research has tended to focus on one or two expressions per study, limiting the opportunity to consider dynamics. Moreover, research that has moved beyond the strike has continued to focus on the most visible and quantifiable of expressions - quitting and grievance-filing. The findings provide support for Lewin and Ichniowski (1986) on the theory of compensating differentials. However, beyond a relationship between the effectiveness of grievances and the supply of employment, the study demonstrates that employees apply a complex calculus comparing the relative supply, utility, and cost of each of the expression options. These calculations - in line with findings on individualisation - are informed by individual preferences. Thus, the findings suggest that despite ongoing debate, expressions of IR conflict - on an individual level - will be complements for some employees and substitutes for others.

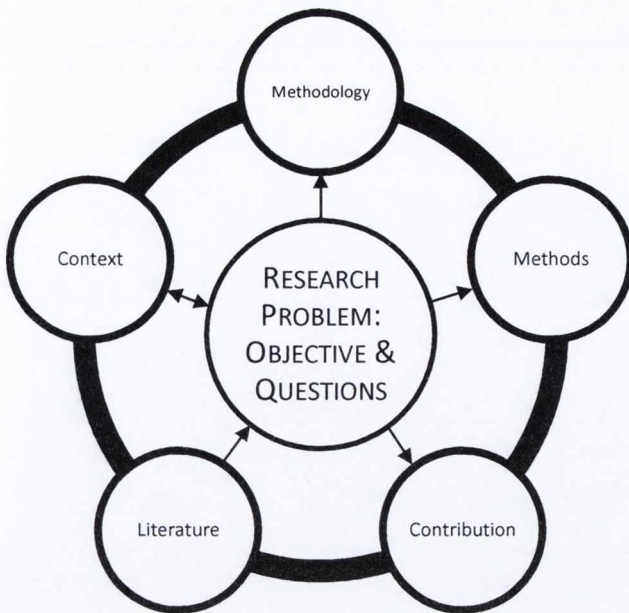
IR authors have lamented the gap in IR conflict literature surrounding the nature, dynamics and development of IR conflict and its expressions in the workplace. Margerison (1969:273) identifies this as a "very serious limitation" while, more recently, Hebdon and Noh (2013:44) conclude that, despite its centrality to conflict management, "[w]e know little about the nature of workplace [IR] conflict". This research contributes to our understanding of how IR conflict develops in the workplace, and how its expressions - despite individualised and non-union pursuit - are replicated across the collective. The study provides qualitative confirmation for Hebdon and Noh (2013) with regard to escalation following non-resolution. However in addition, the study identifies a pattern of de-escalation where, following non-resolution, employees pursue more passive expressions of IR conflict. Three further transmission mechanisms were identified in the study: contagion effects, venting, and workplace culture.

This study concludes that nature of IR conflict, its expression and impact, is - as a function of individuals, relationships and context - complex and varied. No singular expression can provide us



with an understanding of this varied phenomenon, nor can its impact be grasped by one metric. Similarly, no singular methodology can access its makeup or movement. In order to understand IR conflict, IR research must be as varied as its focus of inquiry - and adapt the 'research calculus'.

The next, and final, chapter draws together the elements of the research design identified in Chapter 1, and evaluates this study in the context of 'research fit'. Implications for research are identified along with the limitations of this study.



### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

Drawing this dissertation to a close, this chapter reflects on this PhD research project. Section 9.2 will reconsider the research process in terms of the justification, design, and output of this study (Brannick, 1997). This section will pay particular attention to the research contributions identified in Chapters 6 and 7, and developed in Chapter 8. Section 9.3 evaluates the research project with emphasis on research fit, and the limitations of the study. Implications for further research are also presented.

### 9.2 REVISITING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

It was stated at the outset of this research dissertation that research design, while often left to the methodology chapter, underpins the entirety of a research project and is therefore explicit or implicit throughout the dissertation. By making decisions about problem-formation, the *what* of research (Singleton & Straits, 1999), decisions are necessarily made about the *how* and *where* of research, and the intended contribution.

Previous research has focused on the strike expression of IR conflict. This research sought to explore IR conflict more broadly based on two arguments. First, there has been a sustained decline in strike activity in Ireland (Scheuer, 2006; Roche & Teague, 2010; Roche, 2014) and abroad (Brecher, 2000; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Scheuer, 2006; Bordogna, 2010; Godard, 2011, 2014; Hebdon & Noh, 2013; Saundry & Dix, 2014). In this regard the focus on the strike expression is no longer reflective of our contemporary context. Therefore, continuing to focus on the strike expression provides an outdated view of IR conflict.

The second argument underpinning this study is that focusing on the strike has never provided a comprehensive insight into a central process in the employment relationship. The view that IR conflict is not limited to just one expression is longstanding in IR conflict literature (Kornhauser *et al.*, 1954:15; Kerr, 1954). These authors - prior to a decline in strike activity - stressed the "serious limitation inherent in looking at industrial conflict as if it were confined to strikes and formal disputes". Despite early recognition that "strikes are not synonymous with industrial conflict" (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994:249), IR scholars have continued to adopt an overly-narrow focus (Kornhasuer, 1982; Lansbury, 1988; Drinkwater & Ingram, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013). Consequently, "[w]e know little... about the nature of workplace [IR] conflict itself".

This study sought to contribute to this gap in the discourse. The research objective of this study was to more broadly explore the nature of IR conflict in the workplace. In service of this objective, two research questions were posed:

- I. How do employees express workplace industrial relations conflict?
- II. How does workplace industrial relations conflict impact on the workplace?

Research has focused on the strike expression where "[t]he bulk of strike research has used quantitative methodologies..." (Frazosi, 1989:348). IR research more generally has exhibited a shift toward quantitative and deductive enquiry (Whitfield & Strauss, 2008). However, the suitability of these approaches for exploring IR conflict has recently been called into question. Godard (2011:288) writes:

"... there is need of a more systematic effort at gathering evidence as to the manifestation of conflict. To this end, conventional quantitative research methodologies may provide a starting point, enabling us to identify the frequency of various forms of conflict in the workplace and exploring their covariates. But the analysis in this article suggests that these methodologies are of limited value for tapping into many of the more subtle and hidden manifestations of conflict... and may be of inherently limited value for the study of conflict in general. It seems that there is, at minimum, a need to consider adopting one or more alternative methodological and ontological lenses to complement or even supplant the one provided by conventional research".

Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) recommend a 'problem centric' approach where research questions drive methodological decisions. Therefore, keeping in mind the limitations of 'conventional quantitative research', and the underdeveloped state of theory of IR conflict (Margerison, 1969; Barbash, 1979; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Hebdon & Noh, 2013), this study sought to make a descriptive and theoretical contribution to IR conflict literature using a qualitative case study methodology. This approach was underpinned with an interpretivist approach, and thematic analysis.

Next in the decision-making process (Brannick, 1997) was the research context - or the 'where' of research. Barbash (1979:646) states that "[t]he nature of conflict in the industrial society is probably best understood in particular contexts". Therefore, this study was situated in a healthcare context. This 'particular context' was selected for two reasons. First, the features of the setting point to the potential for IR conflict. Thus, the healthcare setting, of national interest and importance, is considered here an exemplar case (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Yin, 2009). Second, while the healthcare setting in Ireland has a reputation as being conflict-prone (LRC, 2001; Dobbins, 2009; Wall, 2009), it exhibits comparable rates of strike activity. Thus, when using the strike - as the traditional barometer of IR conflict, the healthcare setting is not particularly conflict-prone. However, despite this seeming inconsistency between perception and reality, there is evidence of issues in the sector which may be indicative of non-strike expressions of IR conflict. Therefore, this setting offered a particularly valuable opportunity to explore, more broadly, the nature, expression and impact of workplace IR conflict. In line with the embedded case study design, the study was further situated in the Medlab workplace where the LMRS tracer issue acted as a further context for the emergence of IR conflict.

These concerns – the what, how, and where of research – formulated the research design of this study. However, this author is reminded of Peshkin (1993:23):

"The proof of research conducted by whatever means resides in the pudding of its outcomes... In search of puddings I dug into the large and growing literature of qualitative studies".

Therefore, at this juncture, the chapter will consider the output of this research by revisiting the research contributions.

## AN OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This study made descriptive and theoretical contributions to IR conflict literature. A secondary contribution is made to healthcare management literature. The contributions, discussed and defended in Chapter 8, are revisited below.

### **The Nature of Workplace IR Conflict**

This study demonstrates that despite a decline in strike activity, IR conflict persists in the workplace. Therefore the research highlights that the strike is no longer the most accurate indicator of IR conflict in the workplace. The research suggests that the nature of workplace IR conflict has changed. Qualitative empirical evidence is provided to support speculation amongst IR scholars (Hebdon, 2005; Gall & Hebdon, 2008; Saundry & Dix, 2014; Godard, 2011, 2014) on

the individualisation of IR conflict. Further, evidence is provided indicating a shift toward the passive, covert, and non-union expression of IR conflict. In this regard, the findings suggest a marginalisation of Trade Unions in the expression of workplace IR conflict.

Providing additional evidence of individualisation, the study demonstrates that employees use a sophisticated market type calculus to evaluate expressions of IR conflict. Key considerations are identified as personal cost and utility, and the supply of relative expressions. In this regard, little consideration is afforded to the collective. The study concludes, in respect of the ongoing complements-substitutes debate, that expressions will be complements for some employees, and substitutes for others. It is argued that the identification of a stable aggregate complement-substitute relationship is undermined by the complex and varied nature of IR conflict demonstrated by this study.

A theoretical contribution is provided by the study on the development of IR conflict in the workplace. Adding to the recent work of Hebdon and Noh (2013), this study demonstrates that aside from intentional and active collusion, there are a number of mechanisms through which IR conflict expressions are developed in the workplace. This work provides qualitative empirical confirmation that employees facing non-resolution can escalate their response, thus confirming the work of Hebdon and Noh (2013). Extending this work, the research demonstrates that employees may also de-escalate their response where they re-assess supply, utility and cost factors before proceeding. In addition, three further transmission mechanisms are identified by the study: contagion effects and culture along with venting and the creation of 'shared reactance'. These interacting mechanisms demonstrate how individualised action can be replicated across the workplace. In this regard, expressions which may appear 'semi-collective' (Gall & Hebdon, 2008) in their pursuit may well be individual but replicated expressions of IR conflict.

### **The Expression of Workplace IR Conflict**

This study confirms the existence and use of a wide variety of IR conflict expressions. This further demonstrates that the focus on the strike expression is misplaced. A descriptive contribution is provided to IR conflict literature on the range of IR conflict expressions in the workplace. Further value is provided through the identification of variants within existing expressions.

This research presents the Threat Response Theory of Workplace IR Conflict. This framework of threat responses offers an alternative, more inclusive way to cluster expressions of IR conflict. In this regard, resistance as an expression of IR conflict can be incorporated. Similarly, Fight, Flight and Fix are broader response categories and as such reflect the varied ways employees express IR

conflict in the workplace. In addition, these categories make useful distinctions between a challenge to management and an offer of assistance.

Perhaps more centrally, however, this framework begins to address a central limitation of Exit-Voice (Hirschman, 1970) by recognising that when expressing IR conflict, employees are essentially responding to threat in an interdependent system. Thus, sensitive to the nuances of the employment relationship as distinct from consumer-producer relations (see Edwards *et al.*, 1995), the Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fix framework acknowledges the power imbalance and interdependence of IR conflict.

### **The Impact of Workplace IR Conflict**

This study contributes by demonstrating empirically that the impact of IR conflict on the workplace is, like its expression, varied. This shows, on the basis of participant experience, that IR conflict in its non-strike forms impacts on workplace productivity on a day-to-day basis. However, beyond the focus on productivity, the study demonstrates that IR conflict impacts on workplace stability and adaptability. Arising from the focus of research on the strike expression, these central workplace concerns have been largely overlooked in IR conflict research.

### **Workplace IR Conflict in a Healthcare Setting**

The study illuminates the role of context in shaping the nature, expression, and impact of workplace IR conflict. Specifically, the expression of IR conflict was informed in this setting by concern for the patient; professional status; and a fear of media scrutiny. These context features moderated employee behaviour, and reinforced the passive, covert and non-union characteristics of IR conflict. Similarly, these features shaped the impact of IR conflict on the workplace. Specifically, the study suggests that key areas of concern in healthcare organisations are, in some instances, indicative of IR conflict. This is particularly salient with regard to change implementation in healthcare. While change implementation in this setting is a key area of interest (Buchan, 2000; Barnett *et al.* 2007; Conway & Monks, 2008; Bartram & Dowling, 2013; McDermott & Keating, 2011, 2012, 2014; McDermott *et al.*, 2013), the IR perspective - given the highly pluralist and unionised nature of the context - is a notable absence. This study highlights that employees use resistance as an expression of IR conflict, and demonstrates that IR conflict impacts on workplace adaptability. Therefore, the IR perspective offers a valuable insight. In this regard, a secondary contribution is provided to healthcare management literature.

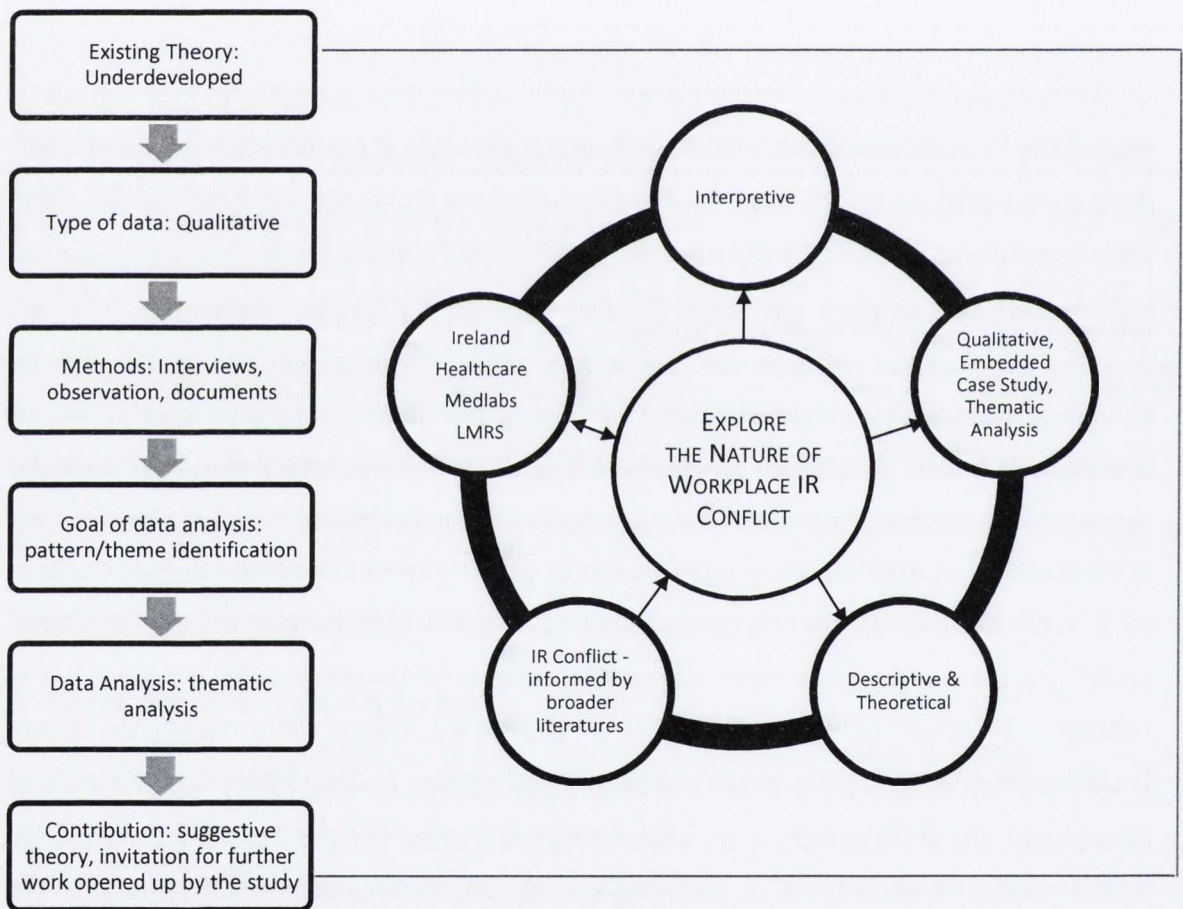
In this section, an overview of the research process was provided. The study sought to explore the nature of IR conflict more broadly than in previous research and adopted a qualitative approach

to achieve this objective. The contributions of the work serve to highlight that the longstanding focus on the strike is misplaced. Moving beyond the strike, this study provides contributions regarding how IR conflict is expressed and developed in the workplace, and how this in turn impacts on the workplace. In this regard, the study sheds light on the varied and complex nature of workplace IR conflict, and opens up the discourse for further enquiry.

### 9.3 EVALUATION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study sought research fit as a form of defensible reasoning (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Figure 9.1 provides an overview of fit in this study, and compares this to the nascent pattern of fit presented by Edmondson and McManus (p. 1160).

Figure 9.1: Evaluating Research Fit



As demonstrated in Figure 9.1, research fit, or consistency between the elements of the research design, was pursued in two ways: each element was problem-driven (Merriam, 2002; Dawson, 2009; Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), and "mutually reinforcing" (Edmondson & McManus, 2007:1156). In this regard, the qualitative approach was selected based on the objective to explore the *nature* of IR conflict. There was also horizontal amongst the elements of this study: the qualitative approach was reinforced by an interpretivist ontology including symbolic

interactionism and phenomenological components (Merriam, 2002). These aspects of design were consistent with the focus on interview data (O'Regan, 2009) and the use of thematic analysis with an IPA orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Silverman, 2011). Finally, the output of the study, as a descriptive and theoretical contribution to literature, is again consistent with the research problem and methods employed.

In addition to research fit, consideration was also afforded to rigour as transferability, credibility, and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this regard, the credibility of the research is bolstered by the provision of competing views and accounts. This is also consistent with the use of MST and the pluralist underpinnings of IR. Further, in line with the phenomenological approach, emphasis was placed on participant truth in terms of (i) the identification of conflictful behaviour (Pondy, 1967), (ii) the assessment of how IR conflict impacts on the workplace. Finally, tables and data structures were used to demonstrate fit between data and the resulting theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Gioia *et al.*, 2012). This also served to improve the dependability of the research where the process of interpretive analysis is made explicit. The transferability of the study is considered in the following section on research limitations.

#### RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Though transferability of findings in this research project is improved by the multiple and comparative case design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009), the study pertains to one national context, therefore transferability of findings requires caution. This is consistent with Edwards *et al.* (1995:287) who explain that covert oppositional practices are likely to be "culturally specific". Weingart *et al.*, (2014) concur explaining that dimensions of national culture can shape how conflict is expressed. This limitation of transferability is particularly salient upon consideration of the references made by participants to the influence of the Irish identity on the passivised expression of IR conflict.

Similarly, the research is confined to one industry setting. The findings highlight the influence of features in the setting – patients, professionals, and the media – on the nature of IR conflict. The findings suggest that these features reinforce tendencies toward covert, passive and non-union expression of IR conflict, and acted as a further disincentive to engage in strike action.

Drawing on Callus and Lansbury (1988:364) who state that "[w]hile the subject matter of industrial relations covers a broad canvas, its essence is to be found in the workplace", this study focused on *workplace* IR conflict. Therefore, an embedded case study methodology was selected. While this approach was most suitable for the research objective, it should be noted that the cases selected are from one type of workplace setting within a pluralist and varied healthcare



context (Mintzberg, 1997; Denis *et al.*, 2001). In addition, the findings indicate that individual preferences influence the appraisal of supply, utility, and costs of expression where occupational grouping - even within the Medlab context informed these calculations. Therefore, other groups in the pluralist healthcare context may hold different preferences regarding the expression of IR conflict.

#### FURTHER RESEARCH

First and foremost, this study highlights the merits of qualitative investigation for the study of IR conflict. This research highlights that IR conflict is a complex and increasingly covert phenomenon. As such, quantitative methods are not well placed to access its varied nature.

This study suggests that the visibility of IR conflict is occluded by the variety of IR conflict expressions available combined with preferences for individualised and covert expression. The research indicates that IR conflict is not the outright battle of the strike but rather a situation of '*guerrilla workfare*' where an employee - or a group of employees - can pursue IR conflict while hiding in plain sight. In this regard, qualitative methodologies are best placed to access the nature, essence or ambience of IR conflict (Berg, 2009). A useful addition in this regard would be an observation-based study. This would ensure consistency between individual interviewee accounts and actions pursued (see Analoui, 1995) and likely provide further insight into the nature of workplace IR conflict. However extensive ethical approval, time, and resources would be necessary components of such research. Further, full participant observation may not be possible in highly-skilled settings where the presence of an observer could pose risks.

With regard to conflict management research, '*guerrilla workfare*' is likely to pose significant challenges where identification of employee behaviours as expressions of IR conflict is increasingly difficult. The findings highlight the potentially significant role of venting as an expression and transmission mechanism of IR conflict. Thus, this seemingly innocuous activity should not be overlooked. However, the study provides support for Gall and Hebdon (2008) and the idea of method displacement. Therefore, conflict management - or 'market intervention' - can have unpredictable effects, particularly in the context of individual preferences and the varied menu of options available.

Drawing on the limitations to transferability outlined above, further research in other national, industry and workplace settings would provide additional insight into the nature of workplace IR conflict, and the role of context in this regard.

In particular it is suggested that a similar study be conducted in An Garda Síochána. This organisation has been denied access to the Labour Court and the Labour Relations Commission; the right to engage in collective bargaining; and the right to strike. Despite this there have been instances of industrial action including 'Blue-Flu' in 1998, and work-to-rule or withdrawal of goodwill in 2010 and 2013. Further, there have been recent high profile episodes of whistleblowing which can be considered as an expression of IR conflict (Gorden, 1988; Edwards *et al.*, 1995). In May 2014 the European Committee of Social Rights concluded that, in these respects, Ireland is in breach of the European Social Charter. It is expected that the provision in the Garda Síochána Act 2005 which prevents a member of An Garda Síochána from being or becoming a member of a Trade Union will be repealed and the Irish police force will gain, amongst others, the right to strike. The Industrial Relations (Members of An Garda Síochána and Defence Forces) Bill 2015 was introduced in the first instance on February 2nd 2015. Building on the work of Hebdon & Stern (1998, 2003), Hebdon (2005), and the findings of this study, the setting provides a rare opportunity to research how employees express IR conflict following the *removal* of a strike ban.

#### 9.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research sought to move beyond the traditional study of IR conflict as a sole event. In doing so, it has highlighted that beyond the dramatic and overt, there is value in researching – with sensitive methods – the subtle day-to-day experience of IR conflict in the workplace. Lansbury (2009:326) writes:

"The relevance and continued existence of industrial relations, as a field of academic study, is facing a number of challenges... as union membership declines, collective bargaining coverage shrinks, and the number of strikes wanes each year".

This study demonstrates that – though IR conflict has changed – it exists in, and dominates, the lived experience of people at work. In this regard, IR has continued relevance in its own right and to a range of related disciplines. The IR field must endeavour to draw on, and offer insights to cognate fields whilst explicitly recognising the overlaps and divergences between perspectives. In so doing scholars, as advocates of pluralism, recognise the value of *difference*.

The IR field has become, in some respects, overly narrow. Kaufman (2004, 2008) explains that the scope of IR, previously broad, became focused on union-management relations and regulation. Similarly, Whitfield and Strauss (2008) note that while IR has a longstanding tradition of inductive and context-specific case study research, there has been a shift toward a quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach. Finally, and most central to this work, early IR writings recognise the variety of IR conflict expressions (Kerr, 1954:70; Fox, 1966:12) and the remit of their impact

(Kornhauser *et al.*, 1954:15). However, this awareness is "nowadays largely forgotten" (Sapsford & Turnbull, 1994: 249). In this regard, the author concludes that relevance and richness of the IR perspective can be revitalised if scholars care to adapt and meet the challenges that change inevitably brings. In short, researchers must 'go back to the future'. With these somewhat hopeful remarks, amidst challenges of 'the times' and the discipline, this author is reminded of a scholar close to home:

"[A]ncient society recognises that there is a public preoccupation about industrial relations but does not really believe that it is the subject of serious academic study. My view – somewhat naturally I suppose – is that it is indeed the subject of serious academic study and that such a study would make at least some contribution to meeting what has been described as the challenge of the times..."

Charles McCarthy (1980:61)

Chair of Industrial Relations, Trinity College Dublin



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Desired and Actual Interviewees

Desired Participants	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Manager</li> <li>• HR/IR Manager</li> <li>• Union Rep</li> <li>• Basic</li> <li>• Senior</li> <li>• Chief</li> <li>• Phlebotomy</li> <li>• Medical lab Aide</li> <li>• Support Staff</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Manager</li> <li>• HR/IR Manager</li> <li>• Union Rep</li> <li>• Basic (2)</li> <li>• Senior</li> <li>• Chief (2)</li> <li>• Phlebotomy</li> <li>• Medical Lab Aide</li> <li>• Support Staff (2)</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Manager</li> <li>• HR/IR Manager</li> <li>• Union Rep</li> <li>• Basic (3)</li> <li>• Senior</li> <li>• Chief (2)</li> <li>• Phlebotomy</li> <li>• Medical lab Aide</li> <li>• Support Staff</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Manager</li> <li>• HR/IR Manager</li> <li>• Union Rep</li> <li>• Basic (2)</li> <li>• Senior</li> <li>• Chief</li> <li>• Phlebotomy</li> <li>• Medical lab Aide</li> <li>• Support Staff</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Manager</li> <li>• HR/IR Manager</li> <li>• Union Rep</li> <li>• Basic (3)</li> <li>• Senior</li> <li>• Chief</li> <li>• Phlebotomy</li> <li>• Medical lab Aide</li> <li>• Support Staff</li> <li>• Consultant</li> </ul>

\* 3 Proxy roles added to protect site and participant anonymity

## Appendix 2: Expert Interviews - Participants and Questions

Experts	Broad Discussion Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Former Union Representative</li> <li>2. IR/HR Employer Representative</li> <li>3. IR/HR Commentator</li> <li>4. IR/HR Academic</li> <li>5. Trade Union Leadership</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you define or describe industrial relations conflict?</li> <li>2. We have had a sustained decline in strike action - has IR conflict gone?</li> <li>3. Where has it gone?</li> <li>4. What happens before the strike?</li> <li>5. What kind of language best captures IR conflict?</li> </ol>

## Appendix 3: NVivo - Creating a Chain of Evidence

Phases of analysis were replicated to facilitate iterative review and maintain a working record of analysis

Name	Rule for Inclusion	Description	Sources
Strike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to strike action</li> <li>References to picketing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"A stoppage of work by a group of workers to express a conflict" (Turkington, 1975:31)</li> <li>"A temporary stoppage of work" (Hyman, 1972:17 cited in Turkington, 1975)</li> <li>Conceptually distinct from other forms of IR conflict due to the complete cessation of production instead of the restriction of production.</li> <li>Often accompanied by picketing</li> </ul>	Turkington (1975)
Mass Resignation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to, or describing, 'mass resignation'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In a mass resignation a group of employees resign from their posts, and therefore terminate the contract of employment, in order to express a conflict</li> <li>Often employees plan to return to work with the same employer</li> </ul>	Turkington (1975)
Go-slow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to a 'go-slow'</li> <li>References to deliberately reducing output to express conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"A go-slow is a deliberate reduction of output by a group of workers in order to express a conflict" (Turkington, 1975:34)</li> <li>Unionised</li> <li>Collective</li> </ul>	Turkington (1975)
Work-to-rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to a work-to-rule</li> <li>References to working within the strict confines of the rules and regulations incl. but not limited to the contract of employment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A strict adherence to the rules and regulations that pertain to employment particularly those which have "the greatest potential effect on the opposing party" (Turkington, 1975:34)</li> <li>Unionised</li> <li>Collective</li> </ul>	Turkington (1975)
The Ban	References to a group of employees refusing to undertake a particular aspect of their work such as overtime	"A ban is a refusal by a group of workers to undertake certain work in order to express a conflict" (Turkington, 1975:35)	Turkington (1975)
Stop Work Meeting	References to unauthorised meetings which involve the discussion of a matter of conflict, and the strategy of	An unauthorised meeting to discuss a matter of conflict which involves the stoppage of work	Turkington (1975)

Name	Rule for Inclusion	Description	Sources
Exit -Quits -Turnover	now to further express conflict  References to terminating employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exit/quit/turnover in the context of IR conflict are described by the 'act of going out or away' where the employee(s) terminate employment to remove themselves from the workplace without the intent to return.</li> <li>The motivation of the act may or may not be communicated to the employer.</li> </ul>	Hirschman (1970), Behrens (2007), Lewin (2005)
Absenteeism -Type 1: -Type 2:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to absences from the workplace</li> <li>T1: References to involuntary absences from the workplace caused by work/conflict induced illness</li> <li>T2: References to voluntary absences from the workplace</li> <li>T2: References to uncertified absences from the workplace</li> </ul>	Can be conceptualised as temporary exit	De Boer (2002), Junor <i>et al.</i> (2009), Tietrich & Fried (1993)
Tardiness -Poor Time Keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to repeated lateness to work</li> </ul>	Can be conceptualised as temporary exit	Bean (1975), Barbash (1979), Rusbult <i>et al.</i> , 1988 cited in Hebdon & Stern (1998)
Soft Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to employees "communicating their ideas and opinions"</li> </ul>	N/A	Bagchi (2011:881)
Voicing Discontent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to 'feeling apart from one's organisation, and</li> </ul>	Both organisational dissent and voicing discontent are characterised by the focus on 'speaking up' to the employer	Hirschman (1970) Kassing (1998)

Name	Rule for Inclusion	Description	Sources
Grievance Filing	<p>expressing disagreement regarding one's organisation'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressing Discontent or dissatisfaction to one's employer</li> </ul> <p>References to making a complaint within the confines of the employment relationship or IR machinery</p>	<p>May be within the organisations grievance procedures or through state provided dispute resolution machinery Used to operationalise voice</p>	<p>Cappelli &amp; Chavin (1991), Bamberger <i>et al.</i> (2008)</p>
Organisational Silence -Defensive Silence (DS) -Acquiescent Silence (AS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to employees withholding opinions, ideas or information</li> <li>DS: References to the above due to fear of retribution</li> <li>AS: References to the above where employee has 'resigned' him/herself to the workplace never changing</li> </ul>		<p>Van Dyne <i>et al.</i> (2003), Morrison &amp; Milliken (2000), Pinder &amp; Harlos (2001), Gamberotto &amp; Camozzo (2010)</p>
Gossip	<p>References to workplace gossip / chit-chat regarding IR conflict</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal and may a series of smaller group interactions</li> </ul>	<p>Waddington &amp; Fletcher (2005)</p>
Sideways Voice / Venting	<p>Communicating discontent with one's employer either to colleagues or beyond the boundary of the workplace</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May involve social media</li> </ul>	<p>Richards (2008), Budd (2014)</p>
Resistance Change / Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to a refusal to accept or comply with something</li> </ul>	<p>More active than withdrawal of cooperation</p>	<p>Dent &amp; Goldberg (1998), Piderit (2000)</p>



Name	Rule for Inclusion	Description	Sources
Withdrawal of Cooperation Withdrawal of Good Will	References to refusing to uncooperative behaviour		Harrison (2001), Commons, 1919 cited in Kaufman (2001), Turkington (1975)
Negligence / Neglect -withdrawal of effort/care -shirking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>References to a failure "to perform... duties either properly or with a sufficient level of care" (Allen &amp; Tüselmann (2009:547))</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May accompany industrial accidents</li> <li>May accompany the misuse of company resources/wastage, theft/pilferage.</li> </ul>	Allen & Tüselmann (2009), Freeman & Medoff (1984), Ozaki, 1988 cited in Hebdon & Stern (1998)
Industrial Accidents	References to industrial accidents to (i) withdraw from the workplace and/or (ii) due to neglect to express IR conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Industrial accidents may be motivated by an intention to withdraw from the workplace or be caused by a withdrawal of effort/care</li> <li>May accompany neglect</li> </ul>	Turkington (1975), Turner <i>et al.</i> , 1967 cited in Hebdon & Stern (1998),
Misuse of Company Resources / Wastage	References to the intentional misuse or wastage of company resources	May accompany neglect	Allen & Tüselmann (2009)
Theft/ Pilferage	References to theft/pilferage	Stealing from the employer	Allen & Tüselmann (2009)
Sabotage	References to the deliberate damage to the organisation	May include damage to equipment, products or reputation	Turkington (1975)
Violence	References to violent acts towards employer or agent thereof	N/A	Turkington (1975)

Appendix 4: Coding Manual

Name	Rule for Inclusion	Description	Sources
Impact of IR Conflict on Productivity	References to Impact of IR conflict on productivity	N/A	Pondy (1967)
Impact of IR conflict on Stability	References to Impact of IR conflict on stability	Predictable behaviour Service Delivery Mission Survival	Pondy (1967)
Impact of IR conflict on Adaptability	References to Impact of IR conflict on Adaptability	Workplace change	Pondy (1967)
Precedent	References to decisions in one instance triggering rule setting in another		Labour Court Review
Procedure	References to rule based interaction of the parties		Labour Court Review
Partnership	References to Social Partnership or workplace partnership		Labour Court Review

## UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

**Dr Gemma Donnelly-Cox**  
**School of**  
**Business Trinity**  
**College Dublin 2,**  
**Ireland**

January 9, 2012

**Re: Application for Research Ethics Approval to the Research Ethics Committee,  
School of Business, Trinity College Dublin**

**Research Project Title:**

“An Investigation into the Manifestation and Impact of Industrial Relations Conflict in Irish Hospitals”

**Applicant:**

Ms Jennifer Cowman (PhD Student)

**Committee Review and Decision:**

The Ethics Committee has reviewed your 'Research Ethics Approval Application' and your 'Further Comments' on the application for the above named project.

The outlines were reviewed solely from a research ethics perspective, without regard for any of the merits or otherwise of the proposed projects. The committee viewed the relevant ethical issue as participant protection, with regard to role anonymity and confidentiality. The committee did not identify any element in the knowledge creation process that is potentially destructive. Participant protection appears to be carefully thought through, with appropriate safeguards in place. The committee recommended that Ethical Approval be given for the project.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Gemma Donnelly-Cox**  
Chair, Ethics Committee

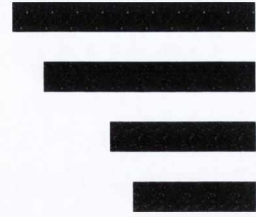
Telephone +353-1-896-2316 (School office: 896-2707 / -1027 / -2338) Fax +353-1-679-9503

Email: [gdnllc@tcd.ie](mailto:gdnllc@tcd.ie) (School office: [bussec@tcd.ie](mailto:bussec@tcd.ie)) Website: [www.tcd.ie/Business\\_Studies/](http://www.tcd.ie/Business_Studies/)



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Research Ethics Committee



24<sup>th</sup> January 2013

051212JC

Ms. Jennifer Cowman  
3.05 Aras and Phiarsaigh  
School of Business  
Trinity College Dublin  
College Green  
Dublin 2

**Re: An investigation into the manifestation and impact of industrial relations conflict**

Dear Ms. Cowman,

Thank you for your communication and subsequent research ethics application regarding the above research proposal. The Chairperson initially reviewed your application and after review wished to forward it to the two Vice-Chairpersons for their review. That review is now complete and the REC has provided a satisfactory retrospective research ethics review. Please note that this is not something that the REC normally does as we expect to review all applications prior to any research study commencing.

Wishing you all the best with your research.

Yours Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Redacted signature]

**Secretary – Research Ethics Committee**

*On behalf of*

**Dr. [Redacted name] Chairperson - Research Ethics Committee**

Appendix 7: Participant Pack - Consent, Ethical Protocol and Confidentiality



TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN  
COLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF DUBLIN

Jennifer Cowman  
School of Business  
Trinity College Dublin  
Aras An Phiarsaigh 3.05



[cowmanjr@tcd.ie](mailto:cowmanjr@tcd.ie)



In association with Trinity College Dublin and the Irish Research Council, Ms. Jennifer Cowman B.A. Mod Business & Economics and Government of Ireland Scholar, will be conducting a scientific study to investigate the manifestations and impact of Industrial Relations (IR) Conflict.

The research seeks to adopt a broader conceptualisation of IR conflict and investigate the multiplicity of conflict manifestations that may exist within an organisation. The research will also investigate the impact of IR conflict by examining the possible link with human resource strategy implementation.

While there are benefits to participating including an opportunity to contribute to service improvement in the health sector, and training in conflict management, participation is **voluntary**. The risks to participants are minimal; all data collected will be held in the strictest confidence and the privacy of participants will be protected at all times. No information will be directly connected to you or the hospital you work in.

The research will be published however all participants will be referred to by a number/position descriptor.

If at any point during the interview you decide you no longer desire to continue, you may feel free to simply stop the interview without any recriminations.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in writing below;

I \_\_\_\_\_ grant the named researcher to interview me in relation to the specified subjects, and for said interview to be recorded and transcribed for the purposes of analysis, and publication – under the proviso that my information is not listed in the thesis or any future publication(s).

Additional Comments:

Research Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:



## Ethical Management Protocol & Protection of Research Participants

**Research Project:** 'An Investigation into the Manifestation and Impact of Industrial Relations Conflict'

**Principal Investigator:** Ms. Jennifer Cowman, PhD Candidate & Government of Ireland Scholar

1. The identity of all participants will be protected by the use of pseudonyms for each of the participants and each of the hospital sites. No material will refer to either the name of the participant or the hospital site. Thus there will be confidentiality of the individual and hospital. In addition the region of the hospital will not be disclosed which provides the hospital and the participants with regional anonymity.
2. Recordings of the interviews will contain no reference to the identity of the participant/hospital, and will refer to the hospitals as site 1,2, 3 and 4 and to interviewees as interviewee 1,2, 3 etc. After data collection is complete hospitals and participants will be given pseudonyms so that the identity of participants cannot be known to other participants in the study.
3. Only the Principal Investigator, Ms. Cowman, will know the identities of participants. Ms. Cowman will enter into a confidentiality agreement with all participants of the study, undertaking to ensure the identity of participants is protected at all times. See letter attached.
4. Any records pertaining to the identities of participants will be secured in a data encrypted system, where only the principal investigator, Ms. Cowman, is permitted access.
5. The thesis resulting from the research will be put on a thesis hold for a period of one to three years which can be extended further if required. The 'thesis hold' function requires that, for any person(s) to access the thesis, prior written consent is required from Ms. Cowman.
6. It is important for all participants to note that participation is **voluntary** and that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Please see consent form attached.
7. This research project has undergone the ethics review process of the TCD School of Business Research Ethics Committee, and was granted ethical approval. See letter attached.

*Should you have any queries or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me*

*directly at [REDACTED] or [cowmanjr@tcd.ie](mailto:cowmanjr@tcd.ie)*



Jennifer Cowman

School of Business

Trinity College Dublin

Aras An Phiarsaigh 3.05

 [cowmanjr@tcd.ie](mailto:cowmanjr@tcd.ie)



This form is intended to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained during the course of the study entitled: An Investigation into the Manifestation and Impact of IR Conflict.

We ask that all participants read the following and sign the statement indicating they agree to comply.

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby affirm that I will not reveal or in any manner disclose information obtained during the course of this study. I agree to discuss material directly relating to this research only with members of the research team. In any reports, papers or publications I write I agree to remove obvious identifiers.

Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: